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LOVE LOST, BUT HONOUR WON.

LOVE LOST, BUT HONOUR WON.

A Novel.

BY

THEODORE RUSSELL MONRO,

AUTHOR OF 'THE VANDELEURS OF RED TOR,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



London :

SAMUEL TINSLEY & CO.,

10 SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND.

1878.

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J. B. R. 289.53. Br. 27/11/53

LOVE LOST, BUT HONOUR WON.

CHAPTER I.

THE BRASSINGHAM FAMILY.

ON the slopes of a Yorkshire valley stands a huge, square pile of buildings, surrounded by well-kept gardens, and, further afield, by miles of yellow gorse and purple heather.

The building itself is massive in structure, gigantic in size, palatial in external appearance and internal appointments. Thither resort in crowds, during the autumn, tourists from all parts of the British isles, some in search of health, some for pleasure, some in quest of both.

On entering the grounds one's social instincts seem to burst into full bloom, in harmony with nature's maturity, the gay

blaze of flowers, and the exuberant health and vitality everywhere visible in nature and in man. As one walks along the winding shrubberies light laughter and young voices are borne upon the autumnal air from croquet-ground and tennis-lawn. Here are grave elders pacing the velvet turf, there a group of happy children feeding the water-fowl in a tiny mountain tarn. Now the sound is the rumble of the bowling-alley, or the creaking of strange machines in the gymnasium.

The month is August. The Wells have attracted even a greater number of visitors than usual. The house is filled from basement to garret. Never before has there been such a good season. The heat of the day is over; every one is out and stirring. The measured beat of the battledore, the thud of croquet-balls, the shouts of children, the merry banter of young men and maidens, the salutations of more staid and sombre age, are heard far and wide upon the evening air in the pleasure-grounds of this Yorkshire paradise.

Among the visitors to the Wells, during the autumn of which we speak, the family of Brassingham formed a conspicuous group.

First, because they were in themselves conspicuous people in their appearance and air.

Secondly, because they formed a centre round which rallied many less well-known groups, who had never seen each other before in their lives, but who all either were, or desired to appear, intimate with the Brassinghams.

Thirdly, because among the ladies of the Brassingham family some were very beautiful, and some were very rich ; consequently young men of all temperaments found attractions in their society.

Lastly, Mr. Brassingham himself was a person not easily overlooked in any society, either for his wealth, his position, or himself. Even had John Brassingham been one of the bath - men at the Wells, instead of a millionaire who happened to be the father of some very attractive young women, he

would all the same have found himself the object of regard of one sort or another to almost every human being who saw him or spoke to him. Some men are accustomed to occupy such a position towards their fellows all their lives, and though it may be often difficult to state in what this pre-eminence consists, yet the fact remains, and most people do not take the trouble to contest it.

In the first place, John Brassingham was a magnificent animal, a man whom to see was to ask who he was, so striking was his figure, so distinguished his air, so resolute his face. In age he was somewhere between forty-five and fifty. He was a man of massive build, and had the appearance of immense strength. His thick black hair was beginning to be sprinkled with grey, though the short square-cut beard was as yet untouched by time. His face was massive and square; his eyes large, brown, and bold. He was a man much admired and much feared. The fact was that the animal nature in him preponderated too

largely. Those who loved him not, while admitting the magnificence of his physical proportions, usually added their opinion that he was coarse or harsh, or sensual or brutal even, as their language corresponded to their degree of dislike. Perhaps he was open to all these allegations, but if he was strong for evil he was equally strong for good, while in all things the very strength of his nature made him suffer the more. When to a personal appearance of so distinguished a type are added the facts that Mr. Brassingham was a millionaire and a widower, it will not be wondered at that he was regarded with much interest by the lady part of the visitors, many of whom thought that to become the second Mrs. Brassingham would be a very desirable arrangement. Beyond the manifold attractions that John Brassingham presented as a possible partner for life, there was an air of deep reserve, of mystery, almost of gloom, about the man, which increased the interest of the fair sex in him to an almost unbounded extent. No one could accuse him of a melo-dramatic

air, yet no one could look at him without a conviction that grave sorrows had followed fierce passions, and that there was a good deal of the devil in him still, which might burst forth again as fiercely now as in his hottest youth.

In short, people at the Wells talked a great deal about John Brassingham, and any one who knew anything at all about him or his family, or his misdeeds, or his money, was plied with innumerable questions, and his answers built up into an astounding fabric of fact and fiction, which was varied and exaggerated by every retailer, till the past life of Mr. John Brassingham had become as mythic as that of Agamemnon.

However, although every one asked who he was, where he came from, whether or no he had a grandfather, and other questions of a like nature, yet no one doubted that he was a wealthy widower, who with his maiden sister and three young daughters, and a certain Miss Violet Champneys, his ward, formed a very important social nucleus among the visitors at the Wells.

Miss Lavinia Brassingham, the sister in question, was fast merging into the condition of an old maid. At any rate she was past forty, in person tall and bony, in manners puritanical and straitlaced; yet she was a woman of some shrewdness and warmth of heart, though she was at pains to conceal any natural amiabilities which might interfere with the severe opinions her religion entailed upon her habits of life. She had striven hard to supply, as far as in her lay, a mother's place to her brother's children since Mrs. Brassingham's death; but she was not a sympathetic woman, nor a tolerant one, and under these circumstances her efforts, meritorious in themselves, had signally failed.

Anne Brassingham, the eldest of the three girls, was just what her mother had been. She had inherited none of the singular beauty of her father's family, in fact she was a rather plain young woman, in no way remarkable, except for a quiet persistency of character which her friends called resolution—her enemies, obstinacy.

The next sister, Theodora, bore a strong resemblance to her father. She was a superb specimen of womanhood. Nature had been very bountiful, some said too bountiful, to her in the matter of physical charms. She was altogether on a very large scale, plenty of bone, plenty of blood, plenty of colour, a wealth of raven hair, large dark eyes, and a general appearance of bounding animal life.

The youngest, May, but just emancipated from the schoolroom, had also inherited her father's vigour and good looks, but in her everything was toned down. Her hair was fairer, her stature smaller than her sister Theodora's. She was altogether built in a more delicate mould, though perhaps even more attractive in her unobtrusive graces than her more showy elder.

There had been brought up with them for some years past Miss Violet Champneys, a ward of Mr. Brassingham's; a pale, blue-eyed, auburn-haired girl, a little older than May Brassingham, a little younger than Theodora. Miss Champneys had neither

the vigour of the two younger sisters nor the calm persistency of character of the eldest Miss Brasingham, yet in her own sweet way she was both beautiful and resolute. In figure she was small and slight and fragile, and her manner was so quiet as to seem demure. Such were the ladies who formed the Brasingham family group. The Misses Brasingham had a brother, a young gentleman, moreover, who never suffered himself to be overlooked in any society in which he might happen to find himself, who combined in his person and character the vigour of Theodora, the beauty of May, and the obstinacy of Anne. But this young gentleman was never spoken of save in a whisper, and that never when Mr. Brasingham was present. Indeed, very few people at the Wells had any idea that there was such a person as Mr. Charles Brasingham in the world.

CHAPTER II.

THE FREEMANS AND THE AMORYS.

THE Brassinghams were standing in a group at the portico of the Wells when a couple of hired vehicles drove sharply up to the entrance, and before the ladies could make good their escape a young man of about seven-and-twenty leaped from the foremost carriage and shook Mr. Brassingham warmly by the hand.

“Freeman! this is indeed a pleasant surprise,” said Mr. Brassingham, cordially; while, to judge by the welcome the newcomer received from the whole family, the pleasure was not confined to Mr. Brassingham alone.

“I am so glad to have this opportunity of

making you all acquainted with my mother," returned Mr. Freeman, who from his manner was evidently on terms of intimacy with the Brassingham family. "Mother," added he, "this is Mr. Brassingham, of whom you have so often heard me speak."

"Indeed, I seem to meet you all as old friends," said Lady Catherine Freeman, warmly; "my son has made me so well acquainted with you by his letters and descriptions. I have to thank you all most sincerely for your kindness to my Frank."

"Here are some more old friends for you to welcome," interrupted Freeman, looking mischievously at Theodora and May. "We must not block the way, mother."

The second fly now drove up. From it first emerged a young, fair, handsome fellow, scarcely more than a boy in years, whose laughing blue eyes flashed a merry challenge to the assembled group on the door-step. Mr. Eric Amory, for such was his name, though among his intimate friends he was commonly known as "Cupid Amory," kissed his hand somewhat pertly to the ladies in a body,

and then assisted to alight a lady who seemed in very delicate health, his mother, Lady Amory.

Lady Amory's greeting was very different to that of Lady Catherine Freeman. Not that it was intended to be other than pleasant, but there was a lackadaisical affectation about the woman's manner that formed a strong contrast to Lady Catherine's frank urbanity. Lady Amory was a delicate-looking, faded woman, who still bore the traces of great beauty, but whose charms were now so obviously the result of adventitious aids that it was almost impossible to guess what might have been the character of her beauty in more youthful days. Her hair, which should have been grey, was a red auburn. Even the lustre of her eyes was the result of paint and pencil, not of health. Though obviously nearer fifty than forty, she had adopted a style of dress suitable only to a young and pretty girl, while her whole air betokened an assumption of a social position to which neither birth nor breeding had entitled her. In

truth, Lady Amory, though occupying the status of a knight's widow, was not a gentlewoman; and although she had contrived to catch much of the superficial gloss which passes muster for refinement, yet she showed her lack of good-breeding in a thousand trifles before people had known her a day. Her husband had been a successful city merchant, who for certain services rendered to Government (nobody quite knew what), had received the honour of knighthood. She herself was but the daughter of a wealthy tradesman. Her father had been a dolls'-eye maker at Nuremberg; but she had received a fashionable education, had mixed in certain sets of quasi-fashionable people, and had ultimately been presented to her sovereign on attaining the much coveted title of "my lady." She was a weak, silly, affected woman, a prey to "nerves," and a devoted Ritualist.

People affirmed, and not without reason, that young Eric Amory must have "favoured his father," as the country people are wont to phrase it; for a young fellow with less

nonsense about him could scarcely have been found. If his beauty was rather that of the cherub, yet with his yellow hair and bright colour and merry big blue eyes, no one could deny that the *sobriquet* of "Cupid" had been aptly bestowed. Without being clever, he possessed a certain shrewdness which enable him to hold his own in the world, and he was as cordially liked by his men-friends as by the gentler sex, which is perhaps the strongest proof obtainable of a young man's soundness of heart and head.

While the ladies were doffing their travelling dresses, Frank Freeman and Eric Amory sauntered out into the grounds for an evening cigar in the twilight.

"Where is Charles Brassingham?" was the first question asked by Eric of his friend, as soon as they were out of earshot. "Is he not here with the rest of them?"

"I forgot to warn you," returned the other, "on no account to mention him, or notice his absence. There has been a worse row even than usual between father and son, and either Charlie left the paternal roof of

his own accord, or was kicked out by his father. I have heard no particulars, indeed the quarrel only occurred just before they came here, and I have had no communication with Charlie as yet upon the subject."

"I dare say we shall be able to get it out of the girls," observed Eric.

"I fancy not," replied his friend. "I think there has been some stronger cause for a row than usual, and the girls have been forbidden to open their mouths on the subject."

"All the more reason they should 'split' on the first opportunity," said Eric. Mr. Brasingham looks terribly down in the mouth, though; don't you think so?"

"I think I never saw him so grave in all the years I have known him," answered Frank; "the fact is he has made a perfect idol of Charlie, and something has happened to prove the idol is only clay after all."

"I cannot imagine what the row can have been about," said Eric, reflectively. "Charlie does not drink, nor does he

gamble, and as to women—why, if half my mother has told me about Mr. Brassingham's own youth is true, it would only be the pot calling the kettle black for the father to come down heavily on the son."

"Both Charlie and his father are men of passionate, ungoverned natures," answered Frank Freeman, "strong for good, it is true, but equally strong for evil. The wonder to me is more that they should have been able to live together as long as they have, rather than that there has been a regular 'blow up' at last."

"Charlie has the very devil of a temper," said Eric; "I saw him in one of his violent passions once, and I sincerely hope I may never see the like again. He is not particularly choice in his language, either, and would probably treat his father to a piece of his mind quite as liberally as he does every one else."

"What you say is perfectly true," replied Frank, "yet, though I have been Charlie Brassingham's closest friend ever since he was my fag at school, I have never known

him lose his temper with me, even under very great provocation. In school-days I was so fond of the boy I could not stand his being even spoken hardly to, much less thrashed, and I think the same feeling has grown with my growth, and strengthened with my strength, for I can never see that he does any wrong, where I might condemn much the same conduct in any one else; or, even if I am forced to admit anything against him, I find so many excuses for his actions that I end by acquitting him altogether."

"Charlie Brassingham is the one subject on which you have never been amenable to reason, my dear fellow," said Eric Amory; "I believe if he forged a cheque, or stole the family diamonds, or even committed a murder, you would find extenuating circumstances in his particular case, and cheerfully commit perjury in his behalf."

To which Frank Freeman simply replied, "Yes, I believe I should."

CHAPTER III.

WHAT THE BRASSINGHAMS THOUGHT OF THEIR
NEIGHBOURS.

WHEN the young men returned to the portico of the house they found Theodora and May Brassingham standing star-gazing at the entrance.

Frank Freeman's intimacy with them dated from his earliest school days. They called each other by their Christian names, and in most ways treated one another as though they belonged to the same family.

Eric Amory's acquaintance was of much more recent date, and consequently he could not be so familiarly admitted to the innermost secrets of the Brasinghams; but there was something about the man so winning,

so bright, and so honest, that no one ever dreamed of keeping him at a distance, or of resenting the graceful impertinences with which he was wont to garnish his conversation.

“Do tell us what sort of people are here,” said Eric to Theodora, as he threw away the end of his cigar.

“The house is full to overflowing,” answered Theodora. “I should say there must be nearly two hundred people here, but the majority are from Manchester or Liverpool, and these keep very much to themselves.”

“Are there no people here whom we have known in town?” asked Frank.

“Vere Vereker is here,” replied Theodora, “and Mr. Gerald Tresilian. They form excellent foils to one another. Mr. Vereker is more homely, more unkempt, more severe in his words and ways, than ever, while Mr. Tresilian has refined refinement till he is little else than gloss, starch, and varnish.”

“You are too hard on them,” Miss Bras-

singham," said Eric Amory, laughing. "If Vereker is a bit of a pedant, he is at any rate one of the most straightforward of men, and I look upon Tresilian as a Brummel without Brummel's vanity or vulgarity. What say you, Miss May?"

"One cannot help liking Mr. Tresilian," answered May, shyly, "for he is always thoughtful of others, even in the smallest details of every-day life, and his attentions are never obtrusive—indeed, his manners are those of a perfect gentleman, but I think a little of his society goes a very long way, at least it does with me, and after too long a dose of his polished courtesies I almost long for a talk with some of the ironworkers in my father's foundry, by way of an agreeable contrast."

"To my mind, Mr. Tresilian's manner is simply exasperating," said Theodora. "It is so coldly, irreproachably perfect. His hair, his smile, his collars, everything about him, down to the varnish on his immaculate boots, seems to say, 'Behold me! am I not fashion personified?'"

“He is elaborate in his dress, certainly,” said Frank Freeman, “and fastidious in his tastes, but I cannot see that he merits the scorn you fling at him on these accounts. In Paris he would be the rage; what you think his faults would become the choicest virtues. He is accomplished, he is well-bred, and he is distinguished-looking; what more would you have?”

“In other words he plays the fiddle, pays empty compliments, and has a fine air of being bored to death. That is not my sort of man,” answered Theodora decisively.

“Vere Vereker can hardly have fallen under your majesty’s displeasure for the like reasons,” said Eric, banteringly, “he certainly holds up the mirror of fashion to no one.”

“I dislike Mr. Vereker’s bluntness almost as much as Mr. Tresilian’s suavity,” returned Theodora. “It is only another form of affectation; I like a man to be natural. Mr. Vereker’s bluntness is put on just as Mr. Tresilian’s blandness is put on; a man whose life is spent in dragging truth to

the surface by the scruff of the neck, so to speak, is simply a social bore, and reminds me of nothing better than of a pig hunting for truffles. The truffles may be worth the finding, and doubtless form a valuable boon to the world at large, but the finder is as much a pig afterwards as before."

Eric laughed, but Frank looked pained at this sally of Miss Brassingham's. He made no further defence of Vere Vereker, however, feeling it was useless to waste time in combating the prejudices of so self-opinionated a young woman as Theodora.

"Tell us about other people," said Eric, presently, appealing to May, "one likes to know the distinguishing traits of people who are going to be in the same house with one for some weeks."

"I have not made any special friends here," answered May, "but Theodora has found one girl who suits her, and indeed we all think her very pleasant. Her name is Agatha Bonchurch. She is a sort of 'humble companion' to Mrs. Higgins and her daughter, whom you may remember in

Surrey, and, as she happens to be a lady, she has an uncommonly bad time of it. Mrs. Higgins would be my pet aversion were it not for Miss Higgins's superior claims to that position."

"And the characteristics of this charming pair?" asked Eric, laughing.

"Are evil-speaking, lying, and slandering," replied May promptly. "They seem to have nothing in the world to do but to ferret out the skeletons in every one's cupboard, and when they can find out nothing to people's disadvantage, they invent with the most deliberate malice. Beyond this, they are enormously rich and atrociously vulgar, and that is almost all I know about them."

"Quite as much as you may be supposed to wish to know," said Freeman. "Who were those two men who passed into the house just as our traps drove up?"

"The big dark man was a Mr. Julian Ferrand; the other, with the sweeping fair moustache, was a Captain Philip Selfe," answered Theodora. "I rather like them

both, but papa seems to have a queer aversion for the latter, whom he characterizes as an adventurer, and although papa seems to be a good deal taken with Mr. Ferrand, he does not like us to be much with him. I think he knows something about him in the past he does not wish to tell us, for he courts his society himself, yet he never allows any one of us to be alone with him for a moment. We cannot make it out."

"They are both friends of some Tempests who are here," added May, "mother, son, and daughter; mother very loud and boisterous, son slightly idiotic and much given to brandies and sodas, daughter a garrison hack who, they say, is as well known in Plymouth and Portsmouth as the barracks themselves."

"Well! upon my word," said Frank, "you young people seem to have made the most of your opportunities in investigating your neighbours' characters. I remember a Mrs. Tempest myself at Plymouth some time ago, and I liked her very much; fair, fat,

jolly sort of woman, somewhere about fifty, with a loud laugh and a double chin ! Does that description suit the Mrs. Tempest who is here ? ”

“ You have hit her off exactly, Frank,” said Theodora ; “ she must be the same person. And did you know Miss Tempest, too ? ”

“ I have danced with her,” answered Freeman, “ and I have seen her ride to hounds, and neither as a waltzer nor as a horsewoman can I name her match.”

“ Quite enthusiastic, I declare,” laughed Miss Brassingham. “ Well, you will have an opportunity of dancing all night with her to-morrow, if you like, for we are going to have a regular ball, and a lot of people are asked from the other hydropathic establishments in the neighbourhood. But here come the Tempests,” she added, in a quick aside. “ What a pleasure to watch your rapturous greeting ! ”

“ Give me your arm, Selfe—give me your arm,” said a woman’s voice in a very loud tone ; “ take me out into the air. That drawing-room is positively stifling.”

The lady who thus addressed Captain Philip Selfe by his surname so unceremoniously nodded familiarly to the Brassinghams (she always was familiar with every one) as she passed out into the open air on Captain Selfe's arm. She glanced inquiringly at Amory, then at Freeman, and, suddenly letting go the captain's arm, she held out both hands to Frank with a cordiality that could not have been surpassed had he been the oldest friend she had in the world.

"To think of meeting you here among the wilds of Yorkshire!" said she, still holding his hands. "How delighted Matilda will be! She is always saying she does not care to dance after having waltzed with you. Selfe, just go and tell Matilda I have met an old friend, whom she must come and speak to at once. She is just round the corner in the corridor with Mr. Ferrand."

"Indeed, Mrs. Tempest," said Frank, in some confusion, "I cannot allow Miss Tempest to take that trouble on my account, nor Captain Selfe to run my errands for me. I shall hope

to renew my acquaintance with your daughter very shortly. May I introduce my friend, Mr. Amory, to you?"

"And may I introduce you both to one of my most valued friends, Captain Philip Selfe?" answered Mrs. Tempest, as she bowed to Amory; "but I shall let you make further acquaintance with one another presently," added she, "for I am dying for one turn round the garden before I go to bed." So saying, she repossessed herself of Captain Selfe's arm and vanished among the shrubberies.

"I thought she was going to kiss you, Frank," said Theodora, as soon as the retreating footsteps were no longer heard. "What a boisterous old woman she is."

"I am glad she succeeded in overcoming the temptation," answered Frank, with gravity; "as to her manner, I rather like it: it is so hearty."

"Captain Selfe seems very devoted," said Amory, after a pause. "Has the old lady money, or is it a *bonâ fide* Platonic attachment?"

“Why Selfe is young enough to be Mrs. Tempest’s son,” said Freeman.

“Sons do not generally dance attendance on their mothers after such a fashion as this,” answered Amory.

“I do not think it is anything more than a matter of convenience on both sides,” said Theodora. “Papa says Captain Selfe has not a penny except what he makes at cards or at billiards, and he consequently finds it advantageous to hang up his hat in other people’s halls. In return he makes himself variously useful, notably in the present instance, by bringing home Mr. Loftus Tempest whenever that worthy young gentleman is too tipsy to come home of his own accord.”

“Theodora! Theodora!” interrupted May, warningly; “do be careful what you say. You may be overheard; and anyhow it is not kind to repeat what we have heard.”

“Rubbish!” said Theodora, contemptuously. “Frank and Mr. Amory may just as well hear the truth from us as from any one else. Everybody in the house knows about it.”

"Everybody does not know about it, Theodora," pleaded May. "People only guess it from what hints the bath-men let drop. No one in the house has ever seen Mr. Tempest tipsy, and, considering the frantic efforts his poor mother makes to keep his secret, it is very cruel of you to make such statements."

"No one ever sees him tipsy because no one ever sees him at all," retorted Theodora. "He is no sooner dressed than he is off down to the hotel, and no one knows what has become of him till Captain Selfe brings him in at the back gate after dark!"

A look of deep displeasure sat upon Frank Freeman's rough-hewn face as Miss Bringham persisted in her accusation; yet in the deep-set dark-grey eyes there was perhaps more sorrow than anger, sorrow that the girl's nature should lack that feminine instinct of protection which throws such a halo over the sex, and causes them naturally to come forward as defenders, not accusers, of those whose faults or follies expose them to the ridicule or scorn of men.

Even Eric Amory's bright face clouded over with annoyance; while he yet shot a look of gratitude to May for coming to the rescue of a man whom he had not even seen. Whatever men may think of other men themselves, they always dislike to hear their fellows run down behind their backs, and more especially when the accusation comes from a woman's lips.

There was an awkward pause. Evidently no one wished the conversation continued. Fortunately it was time for such supper as the last arrivals had ordered, and the two young men, after a few words of hurried apology to the Brassinghams, hastened to join their mothers at the evening meal.

CHAPTER IV.

FRANK FREEMAN.

FRANK FREEMAN was not an ordinary young man, as most people found out before they had been long in his society. Every circumstance of his life, from his birth upwards, had tended to produce intensity of feeling and action in a temperament naturally extremely sensitive and highly-strung. His mother, an earl's daughter, had offended her own family by her marriage with her brother's tutor, Frank's father, a young man of a very old Devonshire family, possessed of great abilities and considerable personal attractions; but without a halfpenny, either then or in the future, for he was not even an eldest son. Of this marriage Frank was the

only offspring. Mr. Freeman had died when the boy was scarcely more than a baby, and though the removal of the husband from the scene had admitted of a reconciliation between the widow and her family, stipulations had been suggested which Lady Catherine could not brook, and Frank Freeman had grown to manhood unknown to, and, as far as possible, unacknowledged by, his mother's titled relations.

The Freemans of Black Tor, an estate on one of the outlying spurs of Dartmoor, had been in the past, and still were by tradition among the first of the great old families of Devon. Though the present representative of the house lived in the lodge at the gates of his own park, which he had let to a retired ironmonger from Glasgow, yet in that exclusive society which forms an aristocratic belt round the mountains of Devon he was Freeman of Black Tor still. The ironmonger paid a high rent, so high that perhaps even in the lifetime of the present owner the mortgages might be paid off, and the king might enjoy his own again. Mr.

Carew Freeman was still unmarried, and at present his nephew, Frank, was heir presumptive to Black Tor. A man, however, who, by reason of his poverty, is compelled to let his house to a stranger and to live at his own lodge, is hardly in a position to contribute to the support of a nephew, even if that nephew be his heir. What little Mr. Carew Freeman could do for his brother's widow and her son he did with his whole heart, for he dearly loved them both. Whenever they chose to ask themselves to the tiny cottage on the confines of Black Tor, they were enthusiastically welcomed and hospitably entertained, but money Mr. Carew Freeman had, at present, none to give.

After being educated at an English public school until he was sixteen, Frank Freeman had been taken to Germany by his mother, with a view to becoming a proficient in languages and science at a cheaper rate than was possible in England. There he had fallen in with young men of an advanced school of free-thought, and though it had

been many years before he had emancipated himself from the rigid severity of the dogmatic faith in which he had been reared, yet he found himself very much alone among his young English fellows when he returned, at the age of twenty-three, to his native country. Since then, in spite of all opposition from friends and relatives alike, he had applied himself resolutely to literature, and though after four years' apprenticeship he still found his pen an inadequate means of livelihood, yet he was willing to submit to any privation rather than earn his bread by any profession which prevented his wandering at will wherever inclination led.

In person he was above the middle height, square built, athletic and symmetrical, with remarkably small hands and feet. His brown hair curled closely over his head, his thick beard was trimmed short and square; his features were irregular, the mouth large, the nose straight and massive, but short; his eyes were the chief feature in his face, being large, brilliant, and of a

deep dark-grey colour. His was a powerful and manly face rather than a handsome one, while such good looks as he possessed were more the result of an intense vigour than refinement of feature, such as he might have been expected to possess in virtue of his birth and ancestry.

His foreign education had developed great natural gifts for music and painting. He possessed a fine ear and a rich baritone voice; beyond these qualifications, he had been excellently well taught both to sing and to play. The result, as might be expected, was that he was an accomplished musician and a finished singer, which provided him with an effective passport to every circle of society. He had been taught gymnastics in Berlin, fencing in Paris, boxing in London. While he was devoted to cricket and every sort of game, he openly avowed that he cared nothing for sport. A good horseman, he scarcely ever rode to hounds; a skilful marksman at the targets, he yet refused all offers to shoot over his friends' preserves. In his likes and dislikes

he disclosed an intensity of feeling that appeared disproportionate and unreasonable, and made him many enemies. Indeed he was in all ways too strong a nature to be popular, too self-opinionated to glide smoothly along the same grooves as his fellows, too free from prejudice and too eccentric in his notions of right and wrong to be approved of by orthodox people of any sort. His Bohemian life, his freedom of thought, his refusal to abide by any ordinary social code, save that which he judged best for himself, never ceased to shock all save the most large-minded of his friends, and to array against him many with whom it was his first interest to keep on friendly terms. There was much of crudeness about his character; even where he was most in advance of his fellows in his opinions and modes of thought, he showed most plainly how undeveloped and unfinished his powers of reasoning were. Having deliberately left the school of thought sanctioned by the caste to which he had been born, and the creed in which

he had been reared, he found himself tossed upon the boundless ocean of speculative philosophy, without as yet sufficient knowledge or sufficient ballast to prevent his drifting continuously from billow to billow, sometimes descrying lights which held out delusive hopes of a near haven, lights no sooner seen than extinguished, leaving his darkness greater than before.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT THEIR NEIGHBOURS THOUGHT OF THE
BRASSINGHAMS.

ON the morning following the arrival of the Freemans and the Amorys, the Brassinghams, accompanied by Miss Tempest and Miss Bonchurch, and escorted by a large contingent of admirers, had scaled the heights above the Wells, with a view to sketching the surrounding country.

Several of the elder ladies, who were unable, by reason of their infirmities, to accompany the young people, were sitting out of doors in the shadow of a huge cedar, and among them were Lady Amory, Mrs. Tempest, Mrs. Higgins, and Lady Catherine Freeman.

In a hydropathic establishment the slightest

introductions are sufficient for the making of acquaintances; besides this, the ladies in question were all more or less known to the Brassinghams, who formed a social centre round which all could rally. The Brassingham family being, as it were, common property, the conversation very naturally fell into a discussion about them.

“ You have known *Mr.* Brassingham many years, I believe,” *Mrs.* Higgins was saying to *Lady Amory*, with a marked emphasis on the “ *Mr.*,” as if she doubted whether her ladyship was quite received by the ladies of the Brassingham family.

“ Oh, yes ! I remember his marriage even,” answered *Lady Amory*, with an air of deep scrutiny into the depths of her childhood’s memories, intended to apprise her listeners of the great difference between her age and *Mr. Brassingham’s*. “ My mother used to tell me all sorts of stories of the time when she and *Mr. Brassingham* were about in society together. What a handsome man he was!—a perfect *Don Juan* with the ladies!—and in those days there were such scandals about

him! If half of them were true, I can only say it is a marvel that he has not had a bullet put in him by one or other of the jealous husbands."

Lady Catherine frowned ominously. "Young men will be young men, Lady Amory," she said. "Even if there were such reports in the past—and I must confess that I, who am the same age at least, or probably older than Mr. Brassingham, never heard of them except as the vaguest rumours—yet surely time enough since then has elapsed for us to allow a dead past to bury its dead."

Lady Amory shrugged her shoulders ever so slightly, indicative of knowing more than she cared to tell; but she only said, very quietly, "Sometimes it is not so easy to bury what one has oneself called into existence."

"Good gracious, Lady Amory!" exclaimed Mrs. Tempest, who, ever hasty in jumping to conclusions, took her ladyship's words to bear but one construction. "You don't mean to say the man is a sort of—patriarch—a father in Israel, with half-a-dozen families in the background!"

“You mistake me,” murmured Lady Amory, waving a heavily-jewelled hand in deprecation of anything so coarsely material. “You mistake me; I merely alluded to misplaced attachments, to hearts that might perhaps have been saved some suffering had it not been for Mr. Brassingham’s many fascinations, not to—to his —”

“Illegitimate children,” said Mrs. Tempest, decisively. “I always call a spade a spade myself, and I frankly admit that is what I thought you meant. It seems you did not, and I beg your pardon.”

“From all one hears,” interrupted Mrs. Higgins, who, having caught scent of something wrong with regard to Mr. Brassingham’s son, was determined to leave no stone unturned till she had ferreted out the truth—“from all one hears, Mr. Brassingham has quite as much as he can manage in the shape of a—a legitimate son!”

“Like father like son,” said Lady Amory, with a sigh; “Charlie Brassingham is a chip of the old block—as handsome, as gay, and as violent as his father was before

him. It is no wonder that two such natures clash."

"They do not clash," said Lady Catherine, sternly, so sternly that Lady Amory gave a little jump in her chair. "Charlie Brassingham and his father have always been devoted to one another. My son, who has been on intimate terms with both for the past twelve years, tells me that the attachment between them is something quite extraordinary in its intensity."

"Doubtless Mr. Freeman speaks as he believes," answered Lady Amory with some asperity; "but I have it on very good authority that Mr. Charles Brassingham and his father are not on speaking terms; nay, more, that Mr. Charles was seen, not a fortnight ago, in very disreputable society in one of the London suburbs, and that he then and there expressed his determination, in very forcible language, never to enter his father's doors again."

"I am really very much astonished," said Lady Catherine. "The quarrel must have been very sudden, for my son was staying

in Mr. Brassingham's house not a month ago, and certainly nothing unpleasant had occurred then."

"It was not told me as a secret," Lady Amory continued; "and, of course, as my house on Wimbledon Common is not a mile from the Brassinghams', I should have heard all about it long ago, had I not been away from home of late. My informant was the curate of a neighbouring parish to ours at home, who happened to arrive here last night shortly before me. His name is the Reverend Silas Monckton. I think you must know him, Mrs. Higgins; he lives quite close to you at Barnes."

This was a home thrust, as Lady Amory well knew; for every one about Barnes neighbourhood was aware that Mr. Silas Monckton, having for some time past kept up an extensive flirtation with both Mrs. Higgins and her daughter, had at length found it impossible to choose between them, and had transferred his attentions elsewhere.

Mrs. Higgins coloured uncomfortably and stammered out that "she had of course

invited him occasionally, as the curate of the parish, but that from various reports that had reached her, she had thought it better, on every account, to discourage his visits as far as possible."

"Here comes Mr. Monckton himself," exclaimed Lady Amory, as a rather corpulent, sleek-looking individual advanced towards the group. "Good morning, Mr. Monckton; I am just in want of your assistance in supporting a statement I have made about Mr. Charles Brassingham; but first let me introduce you to Lady Catherine Freeman and Mrs. Tempest. To Mrs. Higgins you can hardly need a fresh introduction."

Mr. Silas Monckton was one of the most perfectly neutral-tinted men it is possible to imagine. His face was colourless without being pale, his hair was mouse-coloured, his eyes a dull watery grey. On each side of his face an enormous brownish whisker reached from his immense ears to his double chin; he wore neither beard nor moustache, and was by nature entirely destitute of eyebrows. His theological opinions were as

neutral as the rest of him, mind and body, nor could one have told from his dress or remarks whether his doctrinal proclivities were high, low, or broad.

"I was saying," continued Lady Amory presently, when Mr. Monckton had acknowledged his introductions, "that I had heard from you of your chance meeting with Mr. Charles Brassingham. Lady Catherine Freeman cannot be brought to believe in my statement about that young man, so I want you to endorse it."

"I really know very little about Mr. Charles Brassingham," said Mr. Monckton. "I had met him sometimes at his father's house, sometimes at other places in the Wimbledon neighbourhood. One day, about a fortnight ago, I had occasion to visit a dying woman at a small public-house in Brentford, and as I passed the bar, I saw a man about the same height and figure as Mr. Charles Brassingham, standing talking to the barmaid. What chiefly arrested my attention was his dress, which was that of a gamekeeper; a velveteen coat, light corduroy

breeches and gaiters, and a brown felt hat. Remembering how extremely particular Mr. Charles was in his dress, and also that the London season was not yet over, I was sufficiently surprised to stand a moment in the doorway, looking at him. He turned round and asked me, in an angry tone, what I meant by eaves-dropping, when, to my astonishment, I saw he was not Charles Brassingham! In height and figure he was like him, in the shape of the face and in the rich colouring; there was the same heavy brown moustache, the same close-curling dark hair, but the eyes and expression of the two men were totally unlike. Charles Brassingham's eyes are a deep blue, this young man's were brown. Before I had time to explain myself, he had taken a stride across the bar-room and had caught me by the collar, saying, with an oath, 'he would have no parsons prowling about on his preserves.' Indeed, I do not know what would have happened to me at the hands of this young ruffian had not a voice which I recognized as Mr. Charles Brassingham's

suddenly shouted from behind me, 'Hold hard, George! This is a pal of mine!' Released from the fellow's strangling grasp, I turned round, and stood face to face with the real Charles Brassingham, dressed, however, in precisely the same manner as the person he had addressed as George. Charles Brassingham's words were like an electric shock to the fellow who had collared me so roughly. His whole look and bearing changed; his face softened. He roughly, but heartily, apologized for having laid hands on me, swearing that had he known I was acquainted with Mr. Charles there was nothing he would not have done for me.

"Mr. Brassingham vouchsafed no explanation of his presence there, of his rough dress, or of his evident familiarity with a man of the class to which his companion belonged. After the exchange of a few ordinary remarks, I told him my mission to the public-house, and intimated that of course I should say nothing of my having met him under such peculiar circumstances when I again visited at his father's house. To

my utter amazement, he worked himself into a violent passion, said he cared not who knew where he was, or how he lived, and that he would never willingly set foot within his father's doors again. I think he would have proceeded to give me some particulars of the estrangement between himself and his father, had not the young man he called 'George' laid his hand on his shoulder, and said, 'Gently, Charles, gently; little pitchers have long ears.'"

At this period of Mr. Monckton's story Mrs. Higgins was heard to titter audibly, and Mrs. Tempest was troubled with a violent fit of coughing, which for a moment interrupted the narrative.

Mr. Monckton, however, did not seem to perceive any joke, and having waited for composure on the part of his audience, continued, as if no interruption had occurred,—

"The influence of this young man over Charles Brassingham seemed to be as great as Charles Brassingham's over him. He recovered himself almost instantly, though with an effort, and simply saying, 'I am

a fool; come along, George," he nodded me a very informal farewell, and, linking his arm into his companion's, walked off without another word.

"The woman I had gone to visit either could throw no light on the matter, or would not. She had been bedridden for months past, and seemed to know but little of the usual frequenters of the bar. This, my dear Lady Amory," continued Mr. Monekton, turning his watery gaze full upon her ladyship in a manner intended to imply devotion, but which succeeded only in being comic, "is all I know of this melancholy business."

"I presume you have mentioned your *rencontre* with Mr. Charles to his father?" observed Lady Catherine.

"Indeed, I have not," answered the Reverend Silas. "Mr. Brassingham is not the sort of person to whom one could carry a tale of any of his own family; Mr. Charles makes no secret of his whereabouts; his father probably knows as much or more about him than I do."

There was a silence for some moments.

The ladies were impressed—in very different ways, perhaps, but still impressed—with the strangeness of the clergyman's story. Also some one surely must inform Mr. Brassingham that his son was living, almost at his gates, in intimate relations with a game-keeper, or prize-fighter, or worse.

Mrs. Tempest was the first to break the silence. Her curiosity was piqued on the subject of the Brassinghams.

“How long is it since Mrs. Brassingham died?” she asked.

“About four years,” answered Mrs. Higgins. “I knew her well, poor thing. My house at Barnes is about the same distance from Brassingham Park as Lady Amory's house at Wimbledon is from the same place, but of course Lady Amory is too young to have enjoyed such intimacy as I did with Mr. Brassingham's wife” (this with a fine sneer, which was not lost upon the bystanders or her ladyship herself). “I always have maintained, and I always shall maintain,” continued Mrs. Higgins, warmly, “that Mrs. Brassingham died

of nothing more or less than a broken heart ! ”

“ She was the most unreasonably jealous woman in the world,” observed Lady Amory.

“ I deny it,” answered Mrs. Higgins, with more emphasis than politeness; “ but even had she been jealous, she had ample cause. Besides this, Mrs. Brassingham was well aware she had not been married for love. There had been a terrible scandal about Mr. Brassingham, immediately preceding his engagement to the woman who became his wife, about some actress or other, whom he ought to have married and did not, if all accounts were true. However Mrs. Brassingham’s father, I remember, interfered—”

“ How many more generations of Brassinghams are included in your biographical sketch-book, Mrs. Higgins ? ” asked Lady Amory, with an impertinent yawn.

“ Mr. Brassingham’s father interfered,” continued Mrs. Higgins, “ and put an end, as he thought, to his son’s *liaisons*, by insisting upon his marrying the plain heiress, Miss

Anne Flint, who, poor woman, was the mother of Charles Brassingham and the three girls who are here now, and who, to my mind, was one of the most ill-used women in creation."

"Are any of her daughters at all like her?" asked Lady Catherine Freeman.

"Anne is the very image of her, and very like her in disposition as well," replied Mrs. Higgins. "She was, too, her mother's favourite, and much more a companion for poor Mrs. Brassingham than the others, both from being the eldest and from possessing a much larger share of practical good-sense than her sisters. Did you not know Mrs. Brassingham, Lady Catherine?" added she, turning to that lady.

"My acquaintance with the family has been entirely through my son," answered Lady Catherine. "I never saw any of them until last night. From all my son has told me during the many years he has been intimate with them, I should think Mr. Brassingham himself was much to be pitied in his married life. His wife appears, from my

son's description, to have been a very cold, proud woman, quite unable to comprehend a man of so violent and passionate a nature as her husband. But perhaps I ought not to express any opinion, as I never knew them personally."

"I see that I am able to throw some light upon the skeleton in the Brassingham cupboard that even Mrs. Higgins, though she has been on such intimate terms with the family, does not seem to be aware of," observed Lady Amory; "I allude to the famous diamonds left to Mr. Brassingham by his maternal grandmother nearly thirty years ago. Just before Mr. Brassingham's marriage these diamonds were missing, and were found on the person of that very actress whom Mrs. Higgins mentioned but just now. She, of course, asserted that they had been given her by Mr. Brassingham. He declared that, having on one occasion lent them to her, she had refused to give them up again. At last she was induced or forced to give them up under legal pressure, but she took care to let the newly married wife know on

whose neck they had lain before Mr. Brassingham presented them to his bride. This was the commencement of all the bitterness that arose between Mr. Brassingham and his young wife. But it did not stop here. My mother, who knew all the circumstances, and who even saw the letters written by this woman, told me that they contained a threat on the part of the writer that those diamonds should not remain in the hands of the Brassingham family, but should eventually become the property of her own sons by Mr. Brassingham. During my own recollection two attempts to steal these diamonds have been made at Brassingham Park. Since the second attempt, which was while the corpse of Mrs. Brassingham was still lying in the house, the jewels have been placed in the bank. Not even here, however, has the trouble ended. The diamonds are not an heirloom, or so at any rate Mrs. Brassingham chose to believe, for she left them to her daughter Anne in her will, stating that by her husband's gift they had become her private property, and that she could leave them to whom she chose.

Mr. Brassingham denies that they were ever given to his wife for her separate use and benefit, and claims the right to give them to whom he pleases, who, if he marries again, will, of course, be his wife. The diamonds are valued at ten thousand pounds, and are at present at Mr. Brassingham's banker's. But here comes Miss Lavinia Brassingham, so we had better change the subject."

CHAPTER VI.

WATER-CURE SCANDALS.

IN a hydropathic establishment it does not take long for people, who, in other circumstances, would have merely kept up a bowing acquaintance for years, to become friendly, almost intimate, with one another. The advantages are, no doubt, great, that the barriers of English exclusiveness should thus be broken down; but, on the other hand, there are no bounds to idle gossip about the family affairs of the visitors at such a place as the Wells. People frequent such places for the purposes of health and recreation. Idleness is the order of the day. What more natural than that every one should, in ride, or walk, or dance, discuss

his neighbours with his partner of the hour ! People are constantly heard to exclaim, more especially perhaps in establishments of this kind, "How very small the world is !" Genealogies are discussed, cousinships established, stories of So-and-so's naughty doings long ago exaggerated or invented. Everybody soon gets to know why the Smyths have taken to spelling their name with a "y" ; and at what particular period of their career the "De Joneses" thought fit to prefix the "De" to their names ; how the Robinsons had starved on eighty pounds a year until they came in for that vast fortune from a distant cousin ; how the Spratts had made their money by "Spratt's Sauce" ; and the Dobbsses theirs in the tallow trade. Every one knew, or was supposed to know, that young "Jinks" was the illegitimate son of an English marquis by a French dancer, and that Mrs. Tomlinson, for all the airs she gave herself, had once been her husband's cook ! To pass unscathed through the gossip of a water-

cure establishment people must be abundantly godfathered, their credentials must be patent, their position unassailable, and if they have a great sorrow or a skeleton carefully packed away and hidden from the vulgar gaze, let them be quite certain that the searching lens of a hydropathist's telescope will be sure to lay bare the innermost recesses of their domestic history. No wonder, then, that any information, scandalous or otherwise, that could be gained about the antecedents of so conspicuous a family as the Brassinghams was hailed as a perfect harvest of gossip. The position of Mrs. Higgins and her daughter had been considerably improved among the visitors at the Wells, from the mere fact that she lived in the same neighbourhood as the Brassinghams, and all they had to tell was eagerly listened to and dilated upon; but unfortunately for the Higginses, though Mrs. Higgins laid great stress upon her intimacy in former days with the late mistress of Brassingham Park, the Brassinghams who were at the

Wells took pains to show that the acquaintance was of the slightest and most distant. Nor was Mrs. Higgins likely to regain the ground she had lost in popular estimation by the arrival of Lady Amory and her son upon the scene; for there was no love lost between her ladyship and Mrs. Higgins, while each resented the attempts of the other to mount a higher rung of the social ladder than the one upon which each had hitherto rested. That the daughter of a German doll's-eye maker should have become "my lady" was an unpardonable offence in the eyes of Mrs. Higgins, who, being herself the widow of a very vulgar little doctor in a country town, was wont to stigmatize her ladyship as "Trade." Lady Amory, on the other hand, whose settlements had been derived from the doll's-eye manufactory, considered herself as moving in quite another sphere to "that village apothecary's widow," as she was wont to dub Mrs. Higgins behind her back.

Doubtless the Brassinghams themselves

had not much to boast of in the matter of birth. The Amorys were the merest mushrooms, representing the shop in every way, whether wholesale or retail, yet the shop still. According to Mrs. Higgins's creed, she herself was a gentlewoman, because she had married a professional man, and was herself the daughter of an army surgeon; and on this magnificent score she deemed herself vastly superior in caste to any shopkeeper in Christendom. But the Brassinghams had actually seen three generations. They were people who could speak of their grandfather as a landowner and a county magistrate, while avoiding the unnecessary information that he had once been no more than the overseer of the iron foundry which had eventually become his own property by his marriage with his master's daughter. In Mr. John Brassingham and his sister Lavinia there were still latent traces of plebeian blood, which were apt to show themselves more distinctly in seasons of excitement or anger; but in the

younger generation education had expunged the mental strain, while the inherited physical vigour of the low-born iron-founder had been retained in its fullest perfection.

The Amorys were rich, the Higginses also were rich, but the Brassinghams were many thousands a year ahead of both in the matters of social and pecuniary competition. Therefore both Lady Amorys and Mrs. Higgins were intensely, humiliatingly anxious to be considered on intimate terms with the Brassinghams; and, as neither allowed the other's rights to the social status claimed, they detested each other as only *parvenus* in English society can do. Though Lady Amory and Mrs. Higgins were themselves not gentlewomen, yet they possessed that kind of *savoir faire* which passes for good breeding among persons of their own class, and they were both women who saw at a glance whether other people belonged to their own sets, or sets above them; hence they were both particularly anxious to conciliate the good opinion of Lady Catherine

Freeman and Mrs. Tempest, who, though as far as the poles apart in manner and in opinions and in habits of life, were yet both unmistakably representatives of the "upper ten." Apart from Lady Catherine's title, there was that unfailing stamp of high birth and breeding about her which was apparent in her tone and carriage, in her easy courtesy, and her perfect freedom from all affectation. Mrs. Tempest belonged to a different class. A soldier's daughter, she had become a soldier's wife. As she herself expressed it, she had been in a marching regiment all her life. If her manners were free and her conversation somewhat brusque and slangy, yet she preserved her dignity throughout, and though not a woman of a refined mind, nevertheless no one would have denied her the status of a thorough gentlewoman. Her father had been fast, her husband had been fast, her children were fast, she was herself a thorough Bohemian in her tastes and ways of life; yet both Lady Amory and Mrs. Higgins

were well aware that Mrs. Tempest belonged to a caste far above their own.

It has been said before that the Brassinghams had created a sensation among the visitors at these Yorkshire Wells, partly from their wealth, partly from their exceptional good looks, and partly from the air of mystery and exclusiveness that pervaded them all. It was evident that the Freemans and the Amorys had not expected to meet the Brassinghams in Yorkshire, and that the Brassinghams themselves were far from pleased to find the Higginses already inmates of the Wells. At a water-cure establishment people want reasons for every one else's appearance on the scene. Those who are wise in their generation will lie with promptitude and decision, giving out as a reason, perhaps, that too many good dinners in the London season have disagreed with them, even though they may really never have been better in their lives. Certain it is, that unless people invent their own excuses, their friends will do so for them, and that, too, in a manner somewhat

damaging to their pecuniary or domestic reputation.

The Amorys had come for Lady Amory's health. Good! Lady Amory had taken care to make out an elaborate diagnosis of her complaints to any and every acquaintance at the Wells who would listen to her. She had nothing on earth the matter with her, except an inveterate desire for gossip and scandal, which she could obtain for four guineas a week at a water-cure establishment in a more condensed and agreeable form than could be had anywhere else for the same money. But she lived well and to some purpose. As the country people say, she "enjoyed" ill-health at the Wells to her heart's content, and by this means avoided all searching criticism of her reasons for being there at all.

The Freemans, of course, had come because the Amorys had come, at least so Lady Amory gave out. "She could not have come alone," she would say, "in her delicate state of health, nor could she bear to be parted from her boy,"² and as Eric and

Frank Freeman were as David and Jonathan to each other, and as Lady Catherine was as her own sister in her affections, it had been arranged that they should form one party for the autumn trip."

As the Reverend Silas Monckton had arrived after Lady Amory, that lady managed to let it be generally understood that he had come on her account; and had she only had the good fortune to arrive before the Brassinghams she would have certainly given support to the belief that Mr. Brassingham had come on the same quest. But people were at a loss to conceive any ordinary reason for the arrival of the Brassinghams. It was known they had no Yorkshire connexion; the ladies of the family openly said they detested the mixed society of a water-cure establishment. They were all types of glowing, vigorous, splendid health. Money was no object to them, apparently; why, then, had they not gone abroad, as usual? Why, indeed? Theodora, who had an unhappy knack of speaking the truth in season and out of season, had

affirmed that papa wished to be within a day's journey of London and Brassingham Park; and the refusal of the whole family to be drawn out on the subject of the idol of the family, Charles Brassingham, naturally led the scandal-mongers of the Wells to presume that the retirement of the family to a Yorkshire dale was in some way connected with mysterious and disgraceful conduct on the part of the son and heir.

As may readily be imagined, it did not take long for the disclosures of the Reverend Silas Monckton and Lady Amory to become the property of the whole establishment; and by the time the Brassinghams and their satellites had returned from their sketching expedition, the probable misdemeanours of the young Mr. Brassingham were a matter of anxious conjecture to the whole community, not unmixed with a vague hope that the diamonds, although they were affirmed to be at the banker's, might prove to be the source and centre of some thrilling domestic drama.

In this hope, at any rate, they were not to be disappointed.

Lady Catherine Freeman felt that it was impossible she should not consult with her son as to Mr. Charles Brassingham. It seemed to her so extraordinary that a father and son, however violent their tempers, should suddenly, after many years of strongest attachment on both sides, decline to hold any communication with one another, and that, beyond this, the girls of the family, who were devoted both to their father and brother, should at any rate appear to feel no particular anxiety about so serious a rupture. In general Lady Catherine was a singularly reserved woman, one who deemed it the height of ill-breeding to discuss the business of other people; but in this case the friend of her own only son, that son in whom her whole soul was wrapped up, was the person whose career seemed to be thus strangely imperilled. As soon, therefore, as Frank had returned with the Brassinghams to the Wells, Lady Catherine drew him aside, and proposed a saunter round the grounds,

in order that she might state what she had heard.

When she had finished her story, she expressed her strong opinion that it was Frank's positive duty to state to Mr. Brasingham in what company his son had last been seen, even at the risk of being considered meddlesome. "If there is anything really very wrong," she added, "it seems most strange that the Misses Brasingham should be in their ordinary high spirits."

"I had some conversation with Theodora during our walk just now," answered Frank, "and I am convinced, from what she said, that neither she nor her sisters have the least idea of any more serious trouble than there has often been before, when Charlie and his father have fallen out. On several occasions Charlie has left home in a violent passion, swearing he would stand what he considered his father's bullying no longer; but he has always turned up again when his pockets were empty and his anger had cooled down, and as Mr. Brasingham is

quite as quick to forgive as he is to find fault, they have never yet been very long apart. I suspect, however," added Frank, after a pause, "that there are three persons who know a great deal more of this present quarrel than they will divulge. Mr. Brasingham is evidently very unhappy, more than unhappy; a look of care is on his face I never remember to have seen before. His sister is partly in his confidence, but he is a man who would willingly make a *confidante* of no woman. He certainly never did of his wife. Again, it is my fixed conviction that Miss Champneys is the real cause, however innocently, of Charlie Brasingham's departure from home. I have formed this opinion from a hundred trifling incidents, so trifling as not to seem worth mentioning indeed; but Miss Champneys is evidently suffering some deep mental trouble, which she is trying to prevent any one seeing. I should say that probably she loves Charlie, and hopes that he loves her, but that this sudden family jar came just when she had most reason to suppose he would have told

her so; and that, in consequence, he has made, as yet, no proposal to her. In fact, I asked Theodora point blank if Miss Champneys was engaged to her brother, and she most emphatically denied it."

"Yet they have been much thrown together," said Lady Catherine, musingly. "Surely the girls must have noticed any attachment between them, if there had been anything to notice."

"Theodora admits that they all think there is something between Charlie and Violet Champneys, but she is quite positive that there is no engagement, or even understanding as yet," said Frank.

"Can it be that Mr. Brasingham objects to his son marrying a penniless orphan?" asked Lady Catherine.

"I think not," said Frank; "Mr. Brasingham does not look for high marriages for any of his children, and I imagine he would be well pleased if Charlie would settle down with a girl whom Mr. Brasingham so heartily approves as he does Violet Champneys. No; I suspect, it is

just the other way; he does not think his son is steady enough to marry the young ward for whose happiness he feels himself responsible. Charlie has been more than usually wild of late, and I suspect Mr. Brassingham objected to his making love to little Violet while he was mixed up with the low lot it has lately been his pleasure to consort with."

"I thought you told me Mr. Charles Brassingham was not an immoral young man, my dear Frank," said Lady Catherine.

"Nor is he immoral, my dear mother. But for all that he keeps low company; he is constantly about with questionable characters, prize-fighters, betting-men, and even poachers. He has got into a rowdy lot, whose true character he probably does not know. I know for some time past it has been Mr. Brassingham's greatest terror lest Charlie should get mixed up in some disreputable affray, and land the family name in the police reports."

"How very dreadful!" sighed Lady

Catherine. "Can nothing be done to save him?"

"I believe I have more influence with him than most people," answered her son; "but he is quite as difficult to deal with as his father. Neither of them will brook any interference. However, I quite agree with you that Mr. Brassingham must be informed of what you heard this morning. I will find an opportunity this very day. I fancy Mr. Brassingham is anxious on many accounts with regard to his daughters and Miss Champneys. This acquaintance of the Tempests', Mr. Julian Ferrand, seems to me desperately smitten with Miss Champneys, though at the same time he is playing fast and loose with Miss Tempest. Vere Vereker evidently means something by his devoted attention to Anne Brassingham; indeed I should not be surprised to hear that he had already proposed to her."

"Surely Mr. Brassingham would never allow that match!" said Lady Catherine.

"Why not? It would be a most suitable arrangement," answered the son. "Vereker

has birth and brains, Anne has money. They are both very worthy, very commonplace, and very plain ; besides which, I never heard of any one who wanted to marry either of them, except the persons they have apparently chosen. But here is Mr. Brassingham alone, mother. If you will go into the house I will ask him at once about Charlie."

CHAPTER VII.

MR. BRASSINGHAM EXPLAINS HIMSELF.

MR. BRASSINGHAM listened with attention and composure to Frank Freeman's statement. For some minutes he made no reply; then, with an effort to speak calmly, though there was much of suppressed anger in the bold brown eyes, he laid his massive hand on the young man's shoulder and said,—

“Had you been any one else than Frank Freeman I should have felt annoyed, indignant even, that any one should presume to attempt to make peace between my son and me. I believe you to be an honest fellow, Freeman; and you are one of the very few friends my son has of whom he has any reason to be proud. It is not my way to take

others into my confidence, but I have made up my mind to put a stop to all misunderstandings about the nature of my disagreement with Charles, and I cannot expect you to help me unless I explain the facts to you fairly and fully. I am considered a hard man, I know, stern with my children, and in many other relations of life. I am a hard man. I was brought up in a hard school, by a father who treated his children as his slaves. If a groom disobeyed him the groom was discharged on the spot; if a son disobeyed him, the son was told to go about his business and get his living as best he might. I was not a favourite with my father, I was too much like him for that. I had a younger brother; this brother was all in all to my father; this brother disobeyed him. My father was the sternest of the stern; a man of iron will—uncompromising, unforgiving. My brother was turned out of doors with just the clothes he stood up in. He went from bad to worse, and died of drink and destitution, a beggar, in the streets of Melbourne. I tell you this to show you what his other sons and daughters

were led to expect, unless they fell in with his tyrannical will. When I was still an inmate of his house he found out that I had contracted a *liaison* with an actress, and that she had been seen wearing the diamonds left me by a relation of my mother's. That I should have been so besotted as to part with these diamonds made my father believe that I intended to marry the actress in question. He considered the only way to stop this was to see me married to some one else. He looked out for a woman whom he considered suitable, and then he told me to marry her, adding that if I did not I might go and share my brother's fate. To cut a long matter short, I had to yield. I married a woman whom I had not seen twenty times in my life before, a woman who did not love me, and whom I did not love. There is no hell upon earth, Freeman, like the hell of an ill-assorted marriage. Such as it was, I had my reward. When my father died he left me all he had to leave in the matter of land and money. Wealth makes wealth, and I am now a rich man. Yes, I have my reward!"

The composure with which Mr. Brassingham had hitherto spoken seemed to be deserting him. His emotion could no longer be suppressed. As he went on the flash of his great dark eyes spoke to a far deeper passion than that of anger—the passion of a consuming love.

“I can hardly tell what induces me to take you into my confidence,” he exclaimed, turning his gaze full on Freeman. “When I have told you all, you will say you are the last person to whom I should have made confession; but I have known you since you were a boy, Frank, and I believe that you will always act in what honestly seems to you the right way, whatever may be the result; also, I believe if you give me your word you will keep it. Is it not so?”

“Certainly it is so, Mr. Brassingham,” answered Freeman, quite aghast at the vehemence of the elder man’s manner, and surprised beyond measure that any cause, be it what it might, could have so disturbed Mr. Brassingham’s calm self-possession. “Certainly it is so; but forgive my saying, although

I do not for a moment wish to appear as if I were rejecting the confidence you wish to place in me, yet, if it is of a nature you might wish retracted when you came to think over it again, I feel that perhaps I had better not hear it."

"It may seem strange," said Mr. Brasingham, "but it is because you are so devoted to my son that I have chosen you rather than another to whom to unfold the true state of the case. I do not want the advice of a man who would naturally take my part, nor do I care to consult a man whose attachment to Charlie would blind him to all sense of justice between us. But I do expect that you will strictly keep my confidence to yourself, whatever you may think of the disclosures I am willing to make."

"No one shall hear from me anything you wish to communicate, Mr. Brasingham," said Frank. "Since you are pleased to consider me a fit person for your confidence, I am bound to believe you are right, and I am grateful for the honour; but

your experience of life has been so much greater than mine—in fact I should have thought some older man than I would have been able to advise you better.”

“Most men of my own age would simply tell me I am an old fool,” interrupted Mr. Brassingham. “I do not want the advice of men of my own age. They are generally men who have got beyond their youth and the passions that belong to youth’s season: Either the cares of business, or domestic sorrow, or premature feebleness of body, the result of a dissipated life, have dulled and dimmed their sensibilities, so that they can have no sympathy with me. I am as young and as strong and as healthy now as when I was your age. Age is not a matter of years, Freeman; many a man of thirty is old, many another of sixty is young. I am not yet fifty, and during the past few years I have seemed to myself to grow younger and younger, till I stand, as it were, once more in the very prime of my manhood, and on the same vantage-ground of strength and vigour as my own son!”

Frank could not help wondering what was coming. As he glanced at Mr. Brassingham he could not but feel the truth of what has just been said. Mr. Brassingham rejoiced as a giant in his strength. His magnificent figure, altogether free from corpulence, straight as a poplar, towered above his companion, a very type of manhood in its ripest perfection. The bold brown eyes had lost none of their brilliancy, the short square beard was as black as the raven's wing. The stalwart limbs had lost none of their muscular symmetry. His gait was firm and stately, yet elastic with conscious power. Truly this man was right when he asserted that he still stood in the ranks of a vigorous and splendid manhood.

“And what is it that has brought back to me all the emotions of youth?” continued Mr. Brassingham. “What is it that has revived in me all the hopes and fears, all the longings, desires, and ambitions that these many years past have been either unfelt or suppressed? I need not tell you it is love! You do not answer me with

a sarcastic smile; you do not tell me there is no fool so great as an old fool; you do not say that I should leave these follies to my children! No! These are the remarks with which my confidence would have been met had I reposed it in any man of my own years, at least any with whom I am on terms of more than ordinary acquaintance; and this is why I have determined to give that confidence to you. You are strong of will, so am I; you are sturdy and vigorous, so am I; you are honest of purpose, so am I. Hitherto you have looked upon me as your friend's father, as a man whose seniority made an impassable gulf between you and him, as one whose passions either were buried in a dead past, or, if not so buried, ought, by all that is usual and conventional, to be suppressed or known only within my own breast! Rid yourself of these impressions; fling from you the slough of conventional respect my years have cast about your feeling for me. Be my son's friend still, but be mine also. You are old for your age, I am young for

mine ; let us meet on the common ground of manhood, full grown and self-reliant, but with all the passions of that manhood, all its requirements, all its joys and griefs still in their strongest and ripest development."

Mr. Brassingham had worked himself up to a pitch of excitement such as Frank Freeman had never before witnessed in him. That this man, usually so calm, so dignified, so self-contained, should thus break out into raptures, like a love-sick boy in his teens, was indeed astounding to another who had hitherto admired him at a most respectful distance. Not all at once could the younger man grasp the condition of mind which had led the elder to descend from that pedestal of veneration upon which Frank Freeman had voluntarily placed him, and to crave so eagerly the sympathy and support of one almost young enough to have been his own son.

Still Freeman grasped the hand Mr. Brassingham extended with a warm and cordial good-will, pleased beyond measure at the confidence to be reposed in him of a

man whom he had hitherto viewed with an intense admiration amounting almost to hero-worship ; and determined that, whatever that confidence might be, he would do his utmost to be its worthy and most helpful recipient. Having expressed himself to this effect in a few well-chosen words, Freeman felt that perhaps the less he said the better until the unaccustomed garrulity of Mr. Brassingham had had its full fling.

“My married life was a most unhappy one,” said Mr. Brassingham in continuation. “I had never loved my wife ; my wife had never loved me. You will say that you never knew us quarrel, that the unseemly scenes one sees and hears of in some families were conspicuous by their absence at Brassingham Park. True ! but the dull monotony of mutual dislike is a far worse curse in married life than the most violent outbursts of conjugal recrimination. Year followed year of dull hopeless lovelessness ; a life all the more rapid and colourless because unfilled by the more pressing needs of other men. Wealth I had, therefore all stimulus

to work was wanting; position I had, therefore ambition had no charms for me. That women are supposed to make love fill up the measure of their lives is but because custom has ordained that labour shall form no portion of those lives. If a man's life be as empty of all real work as most women's are, his whole being will steep itself in dreams of love, as passionately, as utterly as any woman's under heaven; perhaps all the more fiercely and uncontrollably that his nature and desires are more fierce and uncontrollable than hers.

“My wife died. While she lived I never gave her slightest cause for jealousy; and even though we did not love each other, yet the loss of the mother of my children, the mistress of my house, the sharer of my loveless career, could not but leave a sad blank behind. I went abroad. Lapse of time and constant change of scene first made me accustomed to my loss, then led me on to take pleasure in the society of other women. By degrees my age fell from me like a serpent's slough, the

depression rendered almost chronic by my unhappy home rose off me like a heavy cloud, and I looked out upon the world again with the eyes of youth and strength and freedom. While my wife lived I had been to my children only a stern disciplinarian, now I began to grow towards them, and in their youth to become young myself; but it was too late—too late, at any rate, with the elder ones; Charlie is like me in person, more violent and more passionate than I, and perhaps less forgiving; we have quarrelled often, but he is my only son; we cannot quarrel long. Anne is like her mother, in almost all ways her mother's counterpart. She believes I did her mother injustice. She took her part while she lived. She copies her conduct towards me, even now that her mother is dead. Theodora is self-willed and unruly, and May is but just emerging from childhood. Turn where I would in my new-born longing to be loved and love again, in my own family I met with nothing but temper, reproaches, and rebellion. Is it strange that all my powers

of body and mind should have at last converged to one object of love, and that object a fair and young woman? Tell me, Freeman, was I mad to throw my whole life into this one dream of joy? My life, that has been full of all things else, was empty of love, and therefore empty of all. I have found love, therefore I have found all."

"Indeed, Mr. Brassingham," said Freeman, feeling how utterly feeble and useless any words of his would be to stem the torrent of this passionate heart, "indeed, your conduct seems to me only perfectly natural. You are still young—young in thought, and appearance, and vigour; why should you not share the feelings and passions of youth? Every one supposes, and has supposed for some time past, that you would be likely to marry again. Why should you not?"

"Why should I not?" exclaimed Mr. Brassingham, tightening his grasp on Freeman till the pain was well nigh unbearable. "Why should I not? Because—because my own son has taken from me the one only love

I craved on earth; my own son has stolen from me the one heart I believed to beat for me alone, the one woman whom I could and would have made my wife."

"Whom you could and would have made your wife!" exclaimed Freeman, in amazement. "Why, I did not even know that there was any woman whom Charlie cared for in the least. Explain yourself, pray, Mr. Brassingham: this mystery is altogether beyond me."

Mr. Brassingham calmed himself by a great effort.

"Charlie kept his secret," said he, after a pause, "as well as or better than I kept mine. Two years ago, Freeman, the only really intimate friend I had died, having survived his wife but a few months. His only daughter was left absolutely penniless. She was about the same age as my younger girls. Her father, just before his death, besought me to befriend her. I believed that I could befriend her best by giving her a home with my own children. She came to live with us—she, the Violet Champneys whom you have

known almost as one of us, is the woman whom both I and my son love."

Freeman expressed, by a sign, that he began to comprehend, and motioned Mr. Brassingham to proceed.

"Charlie was away from home during most of the first year she was beneath my roof," resumed Mr. Brassingham, "and even during the last six months he has been constantly absent for periods of a week at a time. I never noticed any love-making between them; on the contrary, I was led to believe there could be none, at any rate on my son's part, for he was hand in glove with a set of disreputable tavern-keepers, and spent most of his time with grooms and prize-fighters and barmaids. My love meanwhile grew day by day stronger and stronger, till I could no longer keep silence on the matter. I asked Violet Champneys to be my wife. She seemed surprised beyond measure, but she did not actually refuse me. She asked for time, said she was very young, hardly knew her own mind, and so forth. During this period of suspense she appeared

profoundly unhappy ; so was I. Charlie was supposed to be in London ; at any rate he was not at home. Violet was in the habit of taking long walks, sometimes with May or Theodora, but more often alone. Of late she had chosen to be always alone. One evening, after having been out by herself for several hours, she arrived at Brassingham Park very weary, very pale, and very self-possessed. I met her in the avenue of limes, just inside the lodge gate. She put her arm within mine, just like a tired child, and said, very simply, apparently without a shade of embarrassment, ‘ I will marry you, Mr. Brassingham, if you still wish me to be your wife.’ Need I tell you my answer ? ”

“ But I do not see what this has to do with Charlie ? ” said Freeman, with some impatience in his tone.

“ Only this,” said Mr. Brassingham, sternly. “ Not a week later I found my son alone with my betrothed wife, pouring out floods of reproaches, anger, love, devotion ; cursing the father who begot him for having been beforehand in the field, accusing Violet of shame-

less treachery to him, of engaging herself to me for my money and position alone. In short, he behaved like a madman, and when he found he could not shake her resolve he flung himself out of the house, swearing never more to enter it."

"And your daughters and Miss Lavinia," asked Freeman, more and more amazed; "do they not know how matters really stand?"

"No, they do not," answered Mr. Brasingham. "Sooner or later they must know, of course; but Violet pleaded that no notice should be taken of our engagement until we left the Wells and returned to Wimbledon Common. As far as I know, Charlie has held no communication with any of them; and, beyond him and me and Violet, the story I have just unfolded to you is known, I believe, to no one. I have asked—nay, implored—Violet to say if she loves my son, but she will not. She only says she will keep her promise to me, yet something tells me that it is my son, not me, she loves. Were it not for him she would have loved me; now, even

if she marries me, I believe her love is lost to me for ever.

“I have now put before you the circumstances under which this unhappy quarrel between my son and myself arose,” resumed Mr. Brassingham. “I have chosen to make a confidant of you in the matter, because, through the many years you have been on intimate terms with us both, I believe that you have become as much attached to us as we have to you, and because I believe you are of so just a character that you will give to either or both of us an unprejudiced and unbiassed opinion as to what should be done. I desire above all things to make Violet Champneys my wife; even if I deliberately abandoned my suit I should none the less consider my son a most unfit person to whom to entrust her happiness; moreover, I have reason to believe that, among the low people whom he has affected of late, he has formed connexions, disreputable at any rate, and which should have been entirely broken off before he spoke of love to a young and

innocent girl like Violet. I am no stern moralist; my own career, before I married, would not bear investigation, and I am not the man to be hard on another, much less on my own son, for any peccadilloes of his bachelor life. But, on the other hand, I do not see why I should deliberately blast my own only chance of happiness in the world, by resigning the woman I love to a man whom I fully believe to be unworthy of her, and whose passion I am not even sure that she reciprocates; and this even when the man in question is my own son."

Mr. Brassingham paused and waited some moments before Freeman made any reply.

"I feel much honoured by your confidence," said Frank, at length, "and that you should base that confidence on any respect for my character. If I have given you the impression that I am an unprejudiced man, that impression is only due to the fact that my whole life is an effort to speak and act without bias, in consequence of my knowing too well that I am by nature swayed by prejudices of every

sort and kind. You have given me leave, Mr. Brassingham, to speak to you as a man of your own age. Pardon, me therefore, if I should say anything that seems wanting in respect to the real difference in our years."

"I wish you to speak your whole mind," said Mr. Brassingham.

"In the first place, then," resumed Frank Freeman, "it is your duty obviously to find out whether Miss Champneys had or has now any feeling for Charlie which can be rightly called love; if she has not, there is every possible reason to suppose that she accepts you because she loves you, and for that reason alone. Why not? Few men have so many attractions in a woman's eyes as yourself. On the other hand, Miss Champneys's conduct in first asking for time, and then on a sudden unhesitatingly accepting you, points to the probability that something came to her knowledge in the interval which for ever dissipated any other dreams in which she may have indulged, whether those dreams had anything to do with your

son or not. Before she came to make your house her home, we may presume she was too young to have formed any attachment elsewhere. Again, if it was something in Charlie's life or intentions with regard to herself that she was waiting to discover, it is hardly likely that so young a girl would be able to ferret out the matter unaided by some person or persons much more up to the ways of the world than she is; nor is she the sort of girl who would have the boldness to investigate any mystery of the kind for herself. It is rather probable that letters were sent to her by people who were aware of your son's attachment to her, and had reasons of their own for wishing him to marry elsewhere. If my surmise is correct, it would be easy enough for such people to bring plausible reasons for Charlie's desertion of her; her very ignorance of the ways of the world would strengthen her credit of them, her discredit of him; and in the firm conviction that he was either engaged, or maybe married, elsewhere, she may have determined to accept your offer.

I am aware that this supposition cannot but be most unpleasant to you," added Frank, as he noticed Mr. Brassingham wince under the explanation of Violet's conduct he had suggested, "but you yourself feel that all the possibilities of the case must be looked fairly in the face, and to my mind this explanation seems to be a plausible one."

"I had never noticed any love-making between them," urged Mr. Brassingham; "and I believe that I, worshipping as I do the very ground she treads on, must have seen her love for Charlie had any such existed."

In his heart of hearts Freeman thought it would have been very strange if Charlie and Violet had not fallen in love with each other, considering their mutual attractions, their youth, their singular beauty, and the close propinquity in which they had passed two years of the most inflammable period of life. He forbore to say so, however, and contented himself with offering his services as a mediator between father and son, in case such services were needed.

“I think it would be well for you to find out Charlie,” resumed Mr. Brassingham. “Of course, as matters now stand, it is best that he should keep away from home; but as he must be dependent upon some one for support, that one should be his own father. He has no money, nor any power of drawing money, nor any reversion which he could mortgage to the Jews. He must, therefore, be living by his wits or on charity, neither of which courses is there the slightest necessity for my son to pursue. On the other hand, if he is too proud to accept support from his own father, simply because that father happens to be his successful rival in a woman’s affections, he must take his own line, and carve out his own career as best he can.”

“As soon as we return to London I will do all I can in the matter,” said Freeman; “but I see some of the guests are beginning to arrive from the water-cure places for the dance we are to have to-night, so perhaps I had better go and dress. You may rely on my prudence.”

CHAPTER VIII.

JULIAN FERRAND.

TRUTH to tell, Frank Freeman was not sorry to escape from this trying interview. Though the feelings he bore towards both father and son were of an unusually strong nature, still it was but in the nature of things that he should feel more of affection for the younger man, more of respect and admiration for the elder. He felt now as if one strong attachment had been pitted against another. To Mr. Brassingham he undoubtedly owed life-long gratitude for innumerable benefits, for generous hospitality and an almost fatherly affection; but, on the other hand, his attachment to Charlie had grown with their growth, and strengthened with their strength; moreover, their friend-

ship had taken deep root in those early days of youth's season when hero-worship plays so large and so real a part in boys' lives; when every superiority is envied, struggled for, and venerated, with a blind enthusiasm unknown in more practical and sober after-life. On these accounts it was a real sorrow to Frank Freeman to hear that these two men, so closely allied to each other by blood, and to him by the ties of affectionate friendship, should have chosen the same woman for their hearts' idol. He would have preferred to hear the story of their rivalry from some other source than Mr. Brassingham, or even Charlie himself, in order that he might stand in the gap between them, without any sort of bias or prejudice in the matter. He had heard that story, however, and only from one side. It was his obvious duty, he said to himself, to learn the other side as quickly as possible, and in the mean time to improve his acquaintance with Miss Violet Champneys.

It was with this intention that his eyes sought out the lady in question, immediately

on entering the drawing-room, where some two hundred people were already assembled. That she was an exceedingly pretty girl Freeman had never disputed; but until this evening it had never been fully borne in upon him that her type of beauty was one of so rare and subtle an excellence. Perhaps it was because Frank held the opinion that, before all things, men and women should be fine animals. Violet Champneys was not a fine animal, hence her type had not attracted Frank's critical eye. She was neither vigorous nor vivacious; on the contrary she was small and slight in figure, subdued and reticent in manner, pale of complexion, a girl who, in all ways, gave the impression of delicate health. She talked but little; her conversation was commonplace; she entirely lacked enthusiasm for any of the pursuits or pleasures girls of her age usually professed to delight in. Yet she was by no means an ordinary girl. There was about her a subtle refinement, a dreamy wistfulness, an appealing grace, which won the sympathy and affection of both sexes, and brought more victims

to her feet than Theodora's superb proportions or May's brilliant colouring did to theirs. Her eyes, of a bright light blue, were more unconsciously eloquent than Theodora's eyes of sensuous brown or May's of darkest sapphire.

Bending over the sofa on which Miss Champneys was seated leaned Julian Ferrand, a man in all ways the opposite of the girl to whom he was paying such assiduous attention. In magnificence of limb, in height, and in animal vigour, Julian Ferrand at any rate equalled, and perhaps excelled, Mr. Brasingham. Moreover, he had youth on his side, and that sort of good looks which youth and health cannot fail to give. As a rule, men admired him much more than women, for men are more given to admire superlative manliness and muscular power than are the gentler sex; perhaps, in many cases, because roughness and coarseness are not so distasteful to them as to women. Now Julian Ferrand, though one of those splendid animals who would have been the cynosure of every eye in the ancient arena or the

modern prize-ring, met with but indifferent success in the drawing-rooms of English homes. Men admired his immense strength and his proficiency in all athletic exercises, while at the same time they were silently jealous of his physical superiority. Girls laughed unconcernedly at the accounts, dwelt on by their brothers with awe and admiration, of Ferrand's colossal figure, his huge arm, and enormous girth of chest. Gentlemen of the "Guy Livingstone" class are out of fashion at present in well-regulated female breasts, especially when such athletes are unprovided with a background of wealth, land, and pedigree.

As far as society could gather, Julian Ferrand was an obscure adventurer. That he was well supplied with ready money was evident enough; his manners were gentlemanlike, yet it was apparent to all gentlemen that he was not quite one of them. Though he rode well, was a first-rate boxer and fencer, dressed to perfection, and spoke French with a Parisian accent, yet there was a subtle something about him which rele-

gated him to "the people" in the minds of all those to whom education and refinement were part of the atmosphere they breathed. Without being vulgar, he lacked polish; his courtesy was clumsy; his bluntness was workmanlike, natural, and real.

The Tempests knew as little about him as the rest of the visitors at the Wells. He happened to be the best billiard-player among the men who frequented the billiard-room, and Captain Selfe, who did not care to waste his time on teaching tyros in the game, soon became intimate with him on this account. To be on friendly terms with Philip Selfe was an "Open, Sesame" to the affections of the Tempests, who, each for special reasons of his or her own, followed wherever the Captain thought fit to lead.

When birds of a feather flock together it is not necessary that all their feathers should agree. Selfe had been an adventurer—of a good-natured, easy-going type, perhaps, but still an adventurer—and he immediately detected in Ferrand plenty of responsive traits. The society of most young men was

tame in the last degree to Captain Selfe. Where pigeons presented themselves for plucking, Selfe performed the operation with skill and consideration, being always careful to preserve life at least in geese with golden eggs. But pluckable pigeons had not put in an appearance at the Wells in any great number this autumn, and Captain Selfe was, to use his own phrase, "having a damnably dull time of it."

To be a sort of "gentleman companion" to an impecunious, boisterous old lady, hampered by a fast daughter who could not be "got off" in the matrimonial market, and a tipsy son who had to be ferreted out and brought home six days out of seven, was not a position to be considered a sine-cure by any man. What earthly reason Philip Selfe had for making himself companion, adviser, nurse, and man-of-all-work to the Tempest family no creature could divine. Still, there he was, occupying a place in the Tempest family which the breath of slander did not attempt to vilify. Mrs. Tempest was a well-connected woman,

her husband, the late General, had been a man of mark ; and, though burdened with a fast daughter and a tipsy son, Mrs. Tempest was not a person who could be snubbed with impunity in any society whatever. Hence, through Mrs. Tempest's recognized position in society, Captain Selfe's character had become partially rehabilitated. Selfe again stood godfather, as it were, to Julian Ferrand ; the Tempests admitted him to terms of intimacy, and society was more or less compelled to follow suit, especially as, if nothing was known of Ferrand's birth and antecedents, there could be no plausible reason for refusing him admittance.

Though Frank Freeman was ever striving to divest himself of all prejudice, and to view persons and things from a purely reasonable point, yet he could not help feeling strongly attracted towards Julian Ferrand. Ferrand's splendid physique, his animal vigour, his lion-like strength, were qualities that in themselves appealed powerfully to Freeman's æsthetic temperament. That he was manly and

courageous added to the glamour cast by his physical perfections; and as Freeman watched him bending close over Violet Champneys his mind had great misgivings for the ultimate peace of the Brassinghams, both father and son. For Freeman, in his heart of hearts, felt sure that the auburn-haired Violet had found out for herself some flaw in the younger Brassingham's life which severed him from her love; moreover that her acceptance of the father had been prompted by the faithlessness of the son, aided by the peculiar position she occupied as a penniless dependent on the charity of the elder man. But how would it be now, when the man that had once been loved was absent and disgraced, after deliberate dethronement from Violet's heart; when any fairly happy union with a stalwart manly fellow of somewhere near her own age might reasonably be hailed as a means of deliverance from a marriage of convenience with one old enough to be her father? In social position there was no comparison between Mr. Brassingham and Julian Fer-

rand, but Freeman was quite aware, from his past experience of Miss Champneys, that in all probability her unintellectual and somewhat vapid nature would be stirred to passion by Ferrand's marvellous electrical power, where Mr. Brassingham's less vehement nature would produce no emotional effects.

Had Freeman been himself a victim to Miss Champneys's steel-blue eyes and auburn hair he would doubtless have been more readily stung into active antagonism with Ferrand; as it was, he was but an outsider, interested, indeed, for the sake of two of his best and oldest friends, in the fate of this pale slip of a girl, but quite unable to fathom the nature of the attraction that brought three such models of superlative manhood to her feet. While he was speculating as to the course of events, Theodora Brassingham touched his arm, banteringly offered him a penny for his thoughts, and then, turning to a lady who accompanied her, introduced him to her new-found friend, Miss Agatha Bonchurch.

CHAPTER IX.

AGATHA BONCHURCH.

It has been stated of Mr. Frank Freeman that he held a strong opinion that before all things men and women should be fine animals. This opinion he was in the habit of making public for the benefit of those whom it might interest, and Theodora Brasingham, being his chief companion among the gentler sex, had heard it more often than she considered good. Doubtless the iteration contained a compliment to her and to her family, for the Brasinghams were very fine animals indeed, and she perhaps the finest of them all; but Theodora knew Frank too intimately to suspect him of any intention in the matter of pretty speeches.

They were great "pals," these two, Theodora and Frank, but if either ever found it well to go out of the beaten tracks of conversation, it was in the direction of blunt fault-finding, not complimentary effusiveness. Theodora herself placed an exaggerated value on personal beauty; she was aware of this herself, and frequently discussed the matter with Freeman, to whom she usually talked much more freely than to any members of her own family, male or female. She had been in the habit of asserting that her natural dislike to all plain people of either sex was too inborn in her for her to form attachments, in love or in friendship, for people not gifted in the matter of physical beauty and vigour. But in Miss Agatha Bonchurch she had found a friend who had put to flight all her preconceived ideas of the qualifications she deemed indispensable to friendship. She had begun to realize that there are qualities of the mind so elevated, so commanding, as entirely to dwarf and overshadow the more conspicuous attractions of the body.

Having found her own pet theories at fault in her relations with Miss Bonchurch, the girl naturally desired that her friend Frank should not remain victorious where she was defeated, and it was with the half-mischievous hope of the overthrow of Frank's most cherished opinions that she had introduced him to her new friend, Agatha.

Miss Bonchurch was the orphan daughter of an officer who, as long as he lived, had eked out an existence upon his pension, but whose private means were absolutely *nil*. On her father's death Miss Bonchurch found herself alone, really alone, in this wide world, "with none to bless her, none whom she could bless." Her mother had been Italian by birth, Italian in all her habits of mind, tastes, and inclinations. Rome had not only been her home, but her heaven. In it she had found all that had seemed sufficient to make life an eternity of joy. Happy girlhood had expanded into yet happier womanhood under the glow of an Italian sky, among the thousand arts that crown imperial Rome; among ruins

of an incomparable past, and rising hopes of a still more incomparable future. Then in the midst of all this happiness a man had come upon the scene, an Englishman, a youth with curled crisp locks and merry eyes—eyes with the bright clear sparkle of English manhood. Then had she weighed Rome and its delights, home and friends and sunshine, against the one new-found love; and love of course had won the day, and she became the wife of a subaltern in a marching regiment. If she found that she had given gold for silver, that the exchange from sunny skies and liberty to a Portsmouth barrack or a station in the bogs of Ireland, did not advantage her, she was woman enough never to let the sad secret out. She had given to her husband all. So perhaps had he given to his wife all. But how many husbands and wives find that the “all” of one is to the “all” of the other as the water of a mountain tarn to the limitless ocean! Perhaps the love Bonchurch had to give his wife was all he had to dispose of. At any rate it

was little enough to starve her. She grew graver and greyer and more wan. Private means they had none; they both began to know that they had made a foolish love-match. Poverty pressed upon them harder and harder. Child after child sickened and faded ere it was known to the world even by a distinctive name. Then the father tried the tables and the turf, and the mother clung to her last surviving one, Agatha, with all the agonized love of a slowly breaking heart. Then God did what He could for the woman. He snapped the frail thread that bound her to her torture, and Agatha found herself motherless. The devil also did what he could for the man. The turf and the tables gave way to the pot-house and the pawnshop, and a few months, steady uninterrupted dram-drinking completed the ruin long since begun, and left Agatha a lonely, friendless, parentless pauper.

Some years had elapsed since Miss Bonchurch had been left to make her own way in the world as best she might. She had

been through much of the usual suffering that falls to the lot of educated women who are condemned by the laws of custom and propriety to seek in the groove of tuition alone the wherewithal to eat, drink, and be clothed.

She had but lately become an inmate of Mrs. Higgins's house, as companion to that lady and her daughter. For such consideration as she received she tried to be thankful; but the Higginses did not belong to a class who readily divine the wants or sorrows of dependents, or who had any sympathy with the instincts of a refined gentlewoman.

There had not been much time, however, in which either the Higgins family or Miss Bonchurch could weigh each other in the balance before they migrated to the Wells, in Yorkshire. Mrs. Higgins was anxious above all things to be considered on intimate terms with the Brassinghams; and if her purpose could be effected through the friendship subsisting between her companion and Theodora she was as willing to accept

this road to favour as any other. Her own daughter, moreover, was daily advancing in the good graces of Miss Anne Brassingham by lending herself to assist Mr. Vere Vereker in his attentions to the heiress; while Mrs. Higgins herself improved every opportunity of making herself useful to the whimsical and grim old aunt Lavinia.

Frank Freeman held Theodora's opinions to be in general impulsive, and too strongly biassed by her enthusiasm for the beautiful. He was, therefore, somewhat taken by surprise when he discovered what manner of woman Theodora's new friend appeared to be. She was very tall and very slight, with a lithe, willowy figure, elegant and graceful, but with none of that vigour that both Frank and Theodora were wont to consider indispensable to good looks. Her complexion was very pale, and of an olive tinge; her type of face almost Oriental in contour and colouring,—a face in which one naturally looked for a large dark eye of black or brown.

But Miss Bonchurch possessed eyes that

were neither black nor brown, but a light blue-grey—eyes full of sympathy and goodness and intellect—eyes that dwelt on everything with an expression of mingled love and sadness—eyes that were beautiful because they were such transparent windows of the mind within, which was itself harmonious, good, and true. But the eyes were not beautiful in themselves. No curling lashes fringed them, no electric flash lightened them, no violet or turquoise hues invited a lover's gaze. No, those eyes were a calm, light blue-grey. Nevertheless, they were the chief feature in Miss Bonchurch's face. Perhaps it was because such eyes appeared as harmonious discord in a face of so Eastern a type.

An Italian cast of countenance might have been expected by those who knew Miss Bonchurch's parentage, but not in Italy even would one expect to see the statuesque repose, the dark pale tint of skin, the lofty, intellectual brows, that characterized Agatha Bonchurch.

“I have been sharing Miss Brassingham's

curiosity as to the cause of your abstraction," said Miss Bonchurch to Frank, as Theodora moved away, leaving them alone together.

"I was but pursuing the normal avocation of all the visitors here," answered Frank, "busying myself about my neighbours' affairs more than my own. One speedily takes a gambler's interest in the game of life in a society where every one seems anxious to stake whatever he or she may have to part with."

"A hydropathic establishment is quite a little world in itself, is it not, Mr. Freeman? I have seldom been more amused by looking on than I have been in our short stay here."

"The whole place ought to be provided with niches specially constructed for two persons," said Freeman, laughing.

"With a gallery for spectators," added Miss Bonchurch. "It is only in the house that we should want either the niches or the gallery, however."

Freeman looked up at her, waiting for some explanation.

“I was alluding to our truly English sociability this morning when we were in the woods,” said Agatha, smiling. “The girls walked on ahead by two and two, and the men lagged behind by two and two, as if all courtesy depended on a separation of the sexes.”

“You are severe, Miss Bonchurch,” answered Frank, flushing, for he remembered that such had really been the order of march until the whole party had settled down to their sketch-books, “but I presume you would hardly have a man claim a partner for a morning walk as he would for a waltz.”

“Is it impossible for a man to interest himself in a general conversation, Mr. Freeman?”

“In heavy marching order, over rugged boulders, quite impossible, Miss Bonchurch.”

“What do you mean by heavy marching order, Mr. Freeman?”

“Being burdened with useless impediments in the shape of camp-stools, railway rugs, waterproofs, and huge portfolios; which most women insist on taking whenever they stir

beyond the precincts of the Wells ; and which they would leave behind unless they found men willing to be beasts of burden ! ”

“ Ah ! I see you are not a ladies’ man, Mr. Freeman.”

“ If being a ladies’ man consists in making oneself into a sort of furniture camel for the improbable requirements of the fair sex in a morning saunter in the woods, most assuredly I am not a ladies’ man, Miss Bonchurch.”

“ But ladies may want to sit down, or to be kept warm, or it may rain, Mr. Freeman,” persisted Agatha.

“ Women are always more concerned with contingencies than facts,” said Frank, bluntly ; “ I do not see why the rules of gallantry should turn a healthy young woman into a maudlin invalid, or a young man into something between a retriever and a beast of burden ! For my own part I have no patience with the artificial requirements of young ladies who are perfectly able to take care of themselves.”

“ Some day I shall find you actually creating the requirements, in order that you

may minister to them," answered Agatha, laughing. "Your time will come. In the mean while there is no lack of retrievers or beasts of burden, as you call them, in this little Yorkshire colony. Mr. Vereker, for instance, is a good dog: he was sent back three times this morning to hunt for Miss Brassingham's lost property, and never once failed to lay it at her feet."

"He will require a nice sense of smell to discover all that Anne Brassingham mislays or loses," replied Freeman. "Perhaps he may be the compensation given her by the gods for her missing faculties."

"What do you mean, Mr. Freeman?"

"Anne Brassingham was born without the sense of touch," replied Frank. "In an attempt to shake hands she grasps your sleeve; in shutting a door she either slams it or leaves it ajar, or pinches her fingers in the action. She will always upset her teacup, and land her knife and fork in her neighbour's lap. Her hand and her head refuse to act in concert in every action of her life. If Mr. Vereker, with all his prim

pedantry and love of method and order, be ordained by the heavenly marriage-makers to counteract Miss Anne's slipshod peculiarities it will be a mercy to the house of Brassingham."

Agatha looked pained. "One must be forbearing to the defects of one's friends, Mr. Freeman," she said. "I thought you were on very intimate terms with the Brassingham family."

"So I am," answered Frank, sharply. "All the more reason for my objection to systematic disregard of a proper sense of touch."

"But if Miss Brassingham's awkwardness is the result of a defective sense, surely she should receive pity rather than blame," urged Agatha.

"You are quite right, Miss Bonchurch," suddenly looking up with a smile. "Forgive my fretful ill-temper, I have been worried to-day more than usual. Anne Brassingham always jars upon me when I am at my best, and when I feel ill her combination of untidiness and preciseness

is almost intolerable. Listen! they have struck up the 'Amoretten' dance; will you not dance with me?"

When a man or woman is really fond of waltzing for its own sake there are few exercises so soothing to both body and mind, especially when a good partner, a good floor, and good music are secured conditions. Frank Freeman looked upon waltzing as an art; but even his fastidious taste was satisfied with Agatha's step, and time, and motion. Frank was a perfect waltzer, a somewhat rare accomplishment among Englishmen. It is astounding to most people who have lived much on the Continent how we Britons can continue to tolerate the mitigated bear-fight of an ordinary English ball-room. When Frank and Agatha at length paused from what to each was an idyll of motion, the comical and the grotesque met their eyes from all parts of the room; couples with their arms flung out at full length, like upraised pump-handles, men who placed their partners' hand in the "small" of their own backs, women who flattened their noses

against men's shirt-fronts ; every species of inartistic romp and uncouth posturing was there. Here Vere Vereker's angular figure skipped, like a goat on its hind-legs, round the ponderous form of Anne Brassingham, who carried out her essential characteristics by making the minutest steps, while at the same time she tore her dress to ribbons, trod on her partner's toes, and showed a greater amount of creased stocking in each whirl than is considered legitimate out of Cremorne or the Mabille. There Miss Higgins glued her lips to her partner's chest, keeping her eyes fixed on the ceiling with a ghastly stare. Some men, conscious of the incompatibility of grace and motion in their own persons, wisely abstained from imitating the gyrations of a shambling bear, or the gambols of a kid ; but how few women, be their age or figure what it may, will consent to believe that repose is their sole attitude of attraction ! Julian Ferrand did not dance, nor, we may presume, did Hercules or Samson in ancient times. He had the sense to know that a towering massive figure

such as his can too seldom find a partner up to his height, and that, however grand his colossal proportions might be in the gymnasium, his physical advantages were unsuitable to the limited scope of a drawing-room.

Gerald Tresilian did not dance. He found no pleasure in it. It damaged the precision of his toilet, ruffled his temper, made him hot and giddy. Mr. Brassingham did not dance. He considered it unbecoming in a man of his age, weight, and dignity; but what woman ever pauses to reflect on her age, weight, or dignity? None. Women like the scare-crows in a field of springing corn, lean and yellow and bony; women like the fat ladies at a village wake, lumpy, mottled, and obese, will still insist on parading their ungainly contortions before a mixed company of men and women who regard them as they would burlesque actresses in a provincial theatre, with mingled pity and dismay. Mrs. Higgins, padded and rouged, still danced, or rather jumped like a pea on a drum, in rhythmical spasms to the music. Lady Amory, her shoulder-

blades and poor thin arms all bare, her dyed hair falling on her almost naked back, still rattled her skeleton to a jerky *deux temps* step, which had been the fashionable dance of her girlhood. Surely, if there is a time for all things, there must be a time to dance and a time to sit still; but the latter never seems to come to a woman till she has fulfilled her share in the comedy of life, and made the world wax merry at her own expense.

The hour was nearing midnight. Frank and Philip Selfe had danced unceasingly with Miss Tempest and Miss Bonchurch; Eric Amory had devoted himself to May and Theodora by turns. Violet had found no lack of partners. The music had just ceased, Frank and Agatha were standing in the portico star-gazing and getting cool, when a figure staggered into the entrance with rolling gait and bloodshot eyes,—the figure of Loftus Tempest!

CHAPTER X.

LOFTUS TEMPEST.

WHEN a man begins to take an unaccustomed interest in a girl he is certain to watch with anxiety how she will conduct herself under unexpected circumstances. This second evening of Frank Freeman's sojourn at the Wells was an eventful one to him. Not that he had fallen in love with Miss Bonchurch, but because she had in their very first interview revealed to him glimpses of a nature hitherto unknown to him among the women of his set; a nature which, from its inherent harmoniousness, seemed capable of attracting all those who sought peace, but found it not, to which class Frank and Theodora more particularly belonged. So different was Agatha Bonchurch to the usual

run of Frank's goddesses that he almost resented the power she wielded, failing as he did to recognize it for what it was,—the power of a mind at perfect peace with itself. Hers was a soul disciplined by early suffering, not only that sort of suffering which is engendered by the conduct of a worthless and selfish parent, by poverty, and by humiliation, but the sorrow of a noble soul, by nature full of joy and blitheness and sympathy for others, doomed to travel a narrow, joyless groove, capable from its nature of little or no expansion. It might be that the pool was so still because unstirred by the winds of passion; it might be that so wild a storm had once raged within its clear depths that all after-loves were but as summer breezes fanning her sweet bosom; these could be but guesses to Frank Freeman. What he saw, or thought he saw, was a woman who, in some mysterious way, seemed raised above the turmoil of everyday life; from whose clear grey eyes there shone out a steadfast faith and a serene peace.

It was therefore with a feeling of almost eager curiosity that Freeman watched the effect produced on Miss Bonchurch by Loftus Tempest's appearance at the present moment. That Tempest had been introduced to her he was aware, from certain casual remarks which had escaped her during the evening, but he was uncertain whether she was acquainted with the nature of the wretched curse which was blighting the happiness and the life of the young man before he had even reached his prime.

Tempest lurched forward, endeavouring to pass the pair, and gain the inner hall, where the visitors were pacing to and fro in the interval between the dances. Catching sight of Miss Bonchurch, he smiled feebly, and made an effort to steady himself before proceeding into the house. His face was ghastly pale; he had fallen in the road and his coat was covered with dust; his fair hair hung damp and matted over his forehead, his hat, crushed and dirty, was jammed on to the back of his head. It was impossible he should be allowed to enter the house

thus; some one must stop him. Freeman had never spoken to him before, and any interference by one of his own sex would, of course, only exasperate him in his present condition. All this Agatha Bonchurch took in at a glance. Leaving Freeman, she said gently to Tempest, as if it were a matter of no particular importance, "Good evening, Mr. Tempest. You forgot your promise to me to let me teach you the *trois temps* this evening; now you must pay for your broken vows by giving me your arm for a turn in the shrubbery. My partner is engaged for the next dance, and I am not fond of stargazing alone."

In a moment she had linked her arm in his, and had drawn him out into the open air. Freeman stood mute. He felt he could not leave her alone with a man in Tempest's condition; yet her gestures rather than any word made him understand she knew what she was about, and was under no misapprehension that the man was sober.

"May I not bring you a shawl, Miss

Bonchurch?" he asked, hesitatingly; "the night is very chilly now."

"Thank you, yes; bring me my shawl, please; I left it in Mrs. Tempest's charge," she added meaningly; "and, Mr. Freeman, I am so desperately thirsty, would you think it very odd if I asked for a soda-and-brandy? You might bring me that at the same time, and no one would be the wiser. I shall be on the seat under the big cedar."

Well did Agatha Bonchurch know that as long as there was a chance of liquor to be had in the garden Loftus Tempest would show no disposition to enter the house. Also that Tempest was well aware he might importune the waiters and bath-men in vain, so strict were the orders against supplying him with drink; thus his only chance of quenching his rising thirst in his favourite beverage, was by staying at her side, and she would take care to make the liquor outlast the already departing guests.

Freeman felt that he too was expected to act with intelligence and discretion; that Agatha had, as it were, invited him into

partnership in a work of charity. Her allusion to Mrs. Tempest must mean that he was to bring the man's mother along with the shawl. He found Mrs. Tempest, with the shawl in her lap, very tired, very sleepy, and rather cross.

"Are these people never going to cease whirling?" she said, as Freeman approached her. "I am quite giddy with looking on. But I was young once myself," she added, more brightly; "and I ought not to complain."

"Take my arm for a turn in the garden, Mrs. Tempest," he replied. "Miss Bonchurch sent me for her shawl; I can take it to her at the same time."

"Two are company, three are none," said the old lady, mischievously. "No, no, I never spoil sport; I should have liked a turn in the cool air very much, but under the circumstances the shawl will be more welcome than I."

"I assure you you will not be *de trop*, Mrs. Tempest; Miss Bonchurch is sitting out a dance with your son. They are under the big cedar yonder. Do come!"

Mrs. Tempest looked up at him, steadily, gravely, wearily. Then she rose with difficulty, for the infirmities of age were beginning to tell upon her. She understood; there was no need of explanation. If there were tears in her voice she did not let them reach her eyes. She clung perhaps a trifle more heavily than was her wont to Freeman's arm, but she hid her serpent in her bosom as only a mother can. She must not let even Freeman see how the poison was coursing through her veins, and sapping the very life-blood at her heart.

"I promised Miss Bonchurch to take her something to drink," said Frank, as they passed the dining-room where refreshments were laid out; "If you will wait here for me I will not be a moment in procuring it."

He quickly returned. They passed out into the garden, and found Agatha and Loftus Tempest seated beneath the cedar. She was talking lightly to him of the pleasures of waltzing, of riding, of skating, of every kind of quick, healthful motion; answering her own questions, covering the

advance of each rising hiccough by a flank movement of light laughter at her own jokes. She knew she must not let the man see she was aware of his condition; if she did, the influence she hoped to gain might be quenched in the shame to-morrow's dawn would bring. As Mrs. Tempest came close their eyes met: the mother knew the girl for a brave ally; the girl understood the wordless woe of the mother's heart. Taking Mrs. Tempest's hand, she pressed her down by her side away from Loftus, and, taking the glass from Freeman's hand, said laughingly,—

“You must be thirsty, too, after your walk, Mr. Tempest. You do not deserve anything at my hands after your desertion this evening, but I will be generous. Shall we split the soda?”

Mrs. Tempest pulled at Agatha's sleeve. The girl must be ignorant of Loftus's real state, she thought, to offer him more drink at such a time. But Agatha, laying her hand on Mrs. Tempest's, by a quick pressure intimated that she knew what she was

about, and must be left to take her own course.

“But I am not in the mood for a ‘long pull,’” continued Agatha, as she sipped the drink, “so you must content yourself with an occasional ‘nip,’ like me. Now turn and turn about,” she added, as she offered him the glass. “But one good turn deserves another, Mr. Tempest. You must promise me to come with us to Bolton Abbey tomorrow. Perhaps you don’t object to waiting on helpless women, as our friend, Mr. Freeman, does.”

Tempest muttered a husky assent, while Freeman disclaimed this interpretation of his words earlier in the evening.

“Mr. Freeman objects to being a retriever, a beast of burden, or a furniture camel,” continued Agatha, in a bantering tone; “especially in the service of my sex. Now, Mr. Tempest, you are a soldier’s son. I expect you to vindicate our claims to be waited on by giving Mr. Freeman a lead in the matter of gallantry. Your labours shall be light. Say, will you carry my furniture

to-morrow, and retrieve for me, instead of Mr. Freeman?"

In the now drowsy depths of Loftus Tempest's brain a silent voice remarked that he would see himself further first, but he replied with such emphasis as his tongue could still command that he was her slave for to-morrow's excursion.

The last carriage had rolled away down the drive, the lights in the house were dwindling one by one, the glass stood empty on the seat by Agatha's side. Loftus Tempest had fallen fast asleep.

Agatha rose, and took Mrs. Tempest's arm within her own.

"Stay by him till we send out Captain Selfe," she said, in a whisper, to Frank. "We will see that the road is clear to his room."

"You are a noble woman," said Mrs. Tempest to Agatha, as they moved away. "How shall I thank you?"

"By letting me help you in your great sorrow," answered Agatha, very softly. "Mrs. Tempest, it would be useless to enter

upon the early sorrows of my own life; let it suffice that, not without cause, I put them all down to unlimited indulgence in drink. I can, then, sympathize with you most thoroughly, and I do. Will you, at any rate while we are here under the same roof, let me help you to the best of my power?"

Mrs. Tempest pressed Agatha's hand in recognition of her desire to serve.

"But," she said, wearily, "what can you do, dear Miss Bonchurch, that I and my daughter and Captain Selfe have not already done? No mother could have devoted herself more thoroughly than I to saving my boy from this fearful vice; no brother would have had the patience and forbearance towards him that Selfe has unceasingly shown. If the love of a mother for her only son, if a sister's persistent devotion, and the staunch friendship of one of his own sex cannot save him, what on earth can? Yet, when once the drinking fit is over, my boy is one of the most affectionate of men."

"While there is life there is hope, dear Mrs. Tempest. The disease is a strong

disease, and from what I have myself seen doctors and advisers are fond of using strong remedies. There is but one remedy worth the trial, and that remedy is impossible to a man in Mr. Tempest's present condition."

"And it is—?" asked Mrs. Tempest.

"Total abstinence!" answered Agatha, gravely. "It seems to me that all compromise with alcohol is but waste of time and energy, at least for a man constituted like your son. I do not mean to say that abstinence must be life-long, but it must be for such a period of time as will obliterate from his body and brain both the cause and the effects of his disease. My acquaintance with your son has been very short, Mrs. Tempest, but in many ways he seems a man of strong will and keen intellect. With such there is always good ground for hope."

"I have heard it said," sighed Mrs. Tempest, "that out of one hundred men who become habitual drunkards the average saved is one, and that out of one hundred women the average is none."

"Then Mr. Loftus Tempest must be that

one," answered Agatha. "Even if those statistics are true—and I do not believe they are—the assertion is a cruel one, lacking both hope and courage, as the assertions of cruel people usually do; but even if we admit that so hopeless a remark is true, it is only so because up to the present time investigation into the causes of the craving for stimulants has been either neglected or suppressed. It is not so very many years since the mad were confined as persons possessed by devils, while their very confinement precluded all hopes of recovery. When we cease to regard drunkenness solely as a vice, and minister to its alleviation as we would to any other form of disease, we shall see it die down like all evil things under the influence of advancing truth."

"Oh, if I could but take heart from your words, Miss Bonchurch! Loftus is my only son, and once I had such hopes of a brilliant future for him. He has a constitution as yet but little broken by his excesses; he has brains, and when he is temperate he can use them to various purposes as well as or better

than his fellows. Beyond this he is at heart a man of strong feelings, capable of great attachment, and, what to me expresses much—a gentleman.”

“No son of yours would be likely to fail in that direction, dear Mrs. Tempest,” said Agatha, smilingly. “If you can manage to prevent Mr. Tempest leaving the house to-morrow without me I think I will undertake to bring him with me to Bolton Abbey. If we can once rouse his social instincts, and prevent our excursions being dull to him, perhaps woman will have more charms for him and the bottle less. But here is Captain Selfe; I will leave you to talk to him while I see that the road is clear.”

Mrs. Tempest hastily explained to Captain Selfe how matters stood.

“Is he too ‘tight’ to walk?” asked Selfe, languidly caressing his huge moustache.

“No, a little persuasion and your strong arm will be all the help he needs,” answered Mrs. Tempest. “Oh, Selfe, when is all this misery to end!”

“We will take counsel about that to-

morrow," he replied; "one o'clock in the morning is no time for a consultation on the liquor laws. I will see him safely to bed; I am pretty well used to that business. Do not let Loftus see you or anyone else. The shame of it only aggravates his desire to drown memory in drink, as soon as he wakes to full consciousness on the morrow."

"You may rely on Miss Bonchurch," said Mrs. Tempest. "Her courage and tact saved Loftus from reeling in among the dancers to-night; and there is now nothing to conceal from her."

Loftus Tempest was not in so helpless a condition but that on being awakened he could lurch across the grass to the entrance-hall, and in half an hour's time the joint efforts of Freeman and Selfe had seen him comfortably into bed. Frank had felt well-inclined towards Selfe from the first, and perhaps among the minor incidents of bachelor life, the "tucking up" of a tipsy acquaintance goes as far towards sealing an intimacy as any other. There is a

mixture of the comic and the tragic in the friendly act which goes far to break down the barriers of conventionality. The element of the ludicrous in tugging at a fellow-creature's boots, or bungling at his shirt-collar, cannot in any way be brought into harmony with the feelings of sorrow for his degradation and contempt for his bestiality. The mental ingredients refuse to mix, and the only result obtained is a mutual recognition of joint services rendered between the attendant nurses, after which it is next to impossible to meet the next day with only a formal bow. Freeman and Selfe were not men who could have been drawn together by any of the more usual contingencies of every-day life. Selfe was popular and easy-going, profligate, and more or less of a scamp; while Freeman, though capable of arousing enthusiastic attachments among his friends, was far from being a popular man with either sex. He was altogether hewn in too massive and positive a moral mould to be considered either a ladies' man among women, or a "good fellow"

among men. He took his place rather among idolaters than idols, partly from an exaggerated depreciation of his own powers and attractions, partly from a keen sense of beauty in others, whether that beauty was in face or figure or in brain. A man who took such searching note of humanity's attributes, a man who attached importance to the lobe of an ear as giving evidence of breeding, and who shuddered at the contact of a clammy hand, was likely to be of far too highly strung a temperament to join itself in friendship with so coarse and practical a nature as Selfe's. Yet Freeman felt there was much to admire even in that very coarseness and workmanlike method of dealing with the world's difficulties. He saw in Selfe a man of many resources, rather than an ingenious scamp; and, like a true hero-worshipper, he separated the good from the evil of the man, and was happy in bowing down to such attributes in the man's nature as he felt he did not possess in his own.

Thus out of the evil of Tempest's de-

grading vice had come the drawing together of many souls that under other circumstances would have experienced no mutual attraction. Agatha, in attempting to soothe and comfort the nearly broken-hearted mother, had been led on to pour out the story of her own life, a life made weary and dependent by the excesses of her father; a life the sympathies of which were most strongly drawn towards those whose sorrow had the same root as her own; and thus these two also had found in each other a true and hearty woman friend, whose differences of age and character, and manner of viewing life rather added fresh attractions to their intimacy than lessened its degree.

CHAPTER XI.

AN EPISODE IN WHARFDALE LIFE.

ON the following morning Agatha Bonchurch waited and waited to catch Loftus Tempest in his usual egress from the house. That as soon as he was dressed he would make for his accustomed haunt in the neighbouring village Agatha was assured. She had made up her mind to play a bold game for this young man's salvation, at the risk of being considered unmaidenly, partly because her nature was to be strongly drawn towards all wrecked human beings, especially those who suffered from the fell disease by which she herself had been made fatherless and dependent, and partly for the sake of the well-nigh broken-hearted mother, who still

presented such a courageous front to society at large. Not that Agatha feared that even the worst scandal-monger at the Wells, would be likely to misconstrue her endeavours to win Loftus Tempest from his cups. Soberness and earnestness of purpose were too strongly stamped upon her every action for the most ill-natured to speak lightly of her efforts. She had set herself to win this young man to social pleasures, to the countless enjoyments life had to give him, if only she could persuade him to relinquish the "devil and all his works," which Agatha held were all held in solution in concentrated essence within the brandy-bottle. She had found out, in her conversation with Mrs. Tempest the night before, that that good lady herself, though a clever shrewd woman of the world, had but little tact in weaning Loftus from his vice; that she alternately spoiled and upbraided her son, and offered him no external excitements in life as substitutes for his darling sin. The friendly banter of Philip Selfe could have but little weight, for Selfe could drink a bottle where Tempest

was the worse for a glass. The advice of the doctor, true in the main, no doubt, that total abstinence was the only cure, Agatha felt to be worse than useless at the present time, for to a man in Tempest's condition such a cure appeared worse than the disease; and the advice only added to his depression and recklessness, because to his brain in its present state it added the element of hopelessness. Doubtless total abstinence was the only real cure, but it could not be enforced, and drink had made Tempest's will too weak for any promise on his part to be worth the acceptance, even if he could be persuaded to give it.

It was within an hour of the time appointed for the party to start for Bolton Abbey when Mrs. Tempest, passing hastily through the hall, heralded her son's advent, and left Agatha to take her own course of action. Loftus lounged wearily down the staircase. He was very young, very slight and fair. Had it not been for the dissipated look on his face, and the watery appearance of his blue eyes, he would have been good-looking.

He possessed naturally a slim, graceful figure, but now he slouched and walked with an uneven, nerveless tread. His forehead was high and intellectual, his features clear cut and aristocratic; and, though his gaze was shifting and uncertain, there was none of that indecision and weakness about the mouth people are apt to consider a certain sign of a character wanting in the powers of self-control. On the contrary, the mouth was both firm and sweet in its expression. In its curves and in the clefts of his smooth chin lay much mirth and appreciation of the ludicrous. All this Agatha noted, as he slowly came towards her.

“Good morning, Mr. Tempest,” said she, cheerily. “I hope you have not forgotten your promise to fetch and carry for me to-day on our excursion to Bolton Abbey. We start in an hour’s time.”

“Well, I think I shall follow later in the day, Miss Bonchurch,” said he, avoiding her eyes. “I half promised to meet a friend this morning in the village, a fellow from one of the other water-cure shops, you know;

and I don't like to disappoint him of his game of billiards."

"A half promise only!" said Agatha, laughing; "Come now, your promise to me was a whole one. No, no; Mr. Tempest, you are my bond-slave for to-day; you sold your services to me last night for a brandy-and-soda, and I mean to be an exacting creditor."

Loftus coloured, and shifted his position uneasily. "Well, I must go down to the inn and leave a message for my friend," said he, "and then I will be back in time to go with you all to Bolton Abbey."

"Now that is very good of you, Mr. Tempest, I had set my heart on your coming with us to-day; and when I found you considered a half-promise to play a game of billiards a sufficient reason for cutting my society I began to suspect you were as ungallant as—well, as most young men. But I am going into the village myself, and will come with you if you will let me," added she. "We shall have to walk fast to be back in time."

“Deuce take the woman!” said Loftus to himself, “a liquor I must have, but how, if she insists on coming?” However, there was nothing for it but to assent with such grace as he could command, and the two were soon trudging down the hill to the village. They came to the library. Would she go in to order books? thought Loftus; then he could speed on to the inn and refresh jaded nature with a long and a strong pull before he came back to fetch her. No! Miss Bonchurch wanted no books at the circulating library. One hope of escape was cut off. The post-office was in sight; doubtless she wanted to send or ask for letters or to buy stamps; then he could get away and indulge in his morning dram. Alas! no. Miss Bonchurch wanted neither letters nor stamps. The haberdasher’s came in sight; perhaps a few yards of ribbon or a pair of gloves might yet befriend him. No! Miss Bonchurch steadily kept pace with him up to the very door of the inn; nay, more, with a look of mischievous fun in her eyes she entered the hall, and, producing from the

depths of her pocket two small flasks, she laughingly asked Loftus to get them filled for her at the bar with the best pale brandy!

“You can have your ‘B.-and-S.’ at the same time, Mr. Tempest,” she said; “and I will look in at the shop-window opposite while you are drinking it.”

Loftus stood amazed. Was this girl a companion dram-drinker? Was it possible that this graceful, refined gentlewoman was addicted to—well, it was no use mincing matters—to the bottle! No! this surely was impossible. That he himself should be fond of a “nip” now and then was only what might be expected in a man, but the vice assumed quite another aspect in a woman! However, there was no time to be lost; he had the flasks filled, not forgetting one of his own in his breast-pocket, and, fortified by a stronger potation than usual for a first “wet,” he crossed the road and delivered the flasks to Agatha.

“I will not trouble you to carry them,” said Agatha, as she deposited them in the

pockets of her dress, "for you have but one breast-pocket, and that is already full."

Loftus stared in amazement and coloured visibly.

"You see, I know all about it," continued Agatha, in a bantering tone. "I saw the neck of your flask peeping out of your pocket last night when we were sitting under the cedar-tree; and you are not likely to forget the claims of that dangerous and false friend, whatever you may fail to remember that has been done for you by those who love you best. Oh, Mr. Tempest!" she went on, her whole tone and manner changed from lively badinage to one of intensest earnestness; "I cannot trifle any longer. You may think me fast or bold or mad, yet if I told you all I have myself suffered by means of that demon drink, I believe you would not think such was my character. Mr. Tempest, I do not know you well, and you may think my interference impertinent, but I have risked your judgment in the love and pity I feel for your poor mother. You are slowly kill-

ing her, as you are fast killing yourself, and by nothing but brandy, brandy, brandy from morning till night."

Loftus walked on with his eyes on the ground, flicking the dust from his boots with his walking-cane, feeling irritated, bored, and annoyed at what he considered a most uncalled-for and unwarrantable interference.

Agatha saw that she had as yet produced no result but a bad one; she immediately changed her tactics. "Many a man," thought she to herself, "who is adamant to reproaches can be won by a skilful appeal to his vanity.

"You must forgive my bluntness, Mr. Tempest," she continued, eagerly scanning his downcast face. "It is not as if you were made of the coarse clay those dull brutes are who can soak themselves in liquor from day to day. If you were, you might drink with comparative impunity, but you are of a highly-strung nervous temperament, as much higher in itself and in its capacities than theirs, as it is less able to bear the excite-

ment of stimulants. I do not wish to flatter you, but you know well enough you have both intellect and good looks far above the average." (Here the frown on Loftus's brow smoothed itself.) "You have good birth, good manners, good position besides: surely you will not throw them all away for anything so low as drink!"

"I have thrown them all away already," answered Loftus, half sulkily, though the allusion to his intellect and good looks had considerably mollified him. "I thank you for taking an interest in my case, Miss Bonchurch," he added, with a touch of sarcasm; "and as you have thought it worth while to speak plainly, so will I. Everybody here knows I 'liquor up,' and everybody avoids me. Men don't mind a fellow who gets festive in his cups, but who can put himself to bed and be none the worse next day. On the contrary, he is considered a very good fellow, and is probably a popular man. But I do not get festive. Drink makes me silent and moody and dull, and as I am not a boon companion under such circumstances men

find me poor company, and avoid me accordingly. As for the women, I do not think I have spoken to any lady but yourself since I have been here."

"That surely is your own fault, Mr. Tempest. There are plenty of nice girls who would enjoy your society and make you enjoy theirs, if you would but give them the chance."

"I do not think so, Miss Bonchurch. They have heard it said I am a drunkard. Propriety demands that they should cut me, and they obey the demands of propriety."

"As I have done this morning," laughed Agatha. "Come, Mr. Tempest, take a more hopeful view of life! No one expects you to turn teetotaller all at once. Come with us to-day. Enjoy yourself in making others happy by your presence. Your mother will be overjoyed to have you with us all, and I have done my share by seeing that you shall not be entirely cut off from your old enemy," she added, as she held up a flask. "Do you not think I deserve some reward at your hands for my thoughtfulness, Mr. Tempest?"

"It is, indeed, very good of you to interest yourself in my welfare, Miss Bonchurch," Loftus answered, feeling very hot and uncomfortable; "but do you really mean to hold me to my promise to go to Bolton Abbey? I really am not fit for it. My nervous system is upset; I feel I cannot face a lot of strangers. Do release me from my promise and let me stay at home."

"Mr. Tempest," said Agatha, as she stood still at the gate leading to the grounds of the Wells, "no one can help a man who will not lift a finger to help himself. You will not have strangers with you; at any rate, not strangers alone. Are your mother and sister strangers? Is Captain Selfe? Am I? Come. I have shown you that I am at least no prude. I knew you would not come if you knew you would be out of reach of your usual stimulant. That is why I went to the inn this morning. I will be your barmaid for the day. I cannot release you from your promise, but I will help you to fulfil it. See, they are already getting into the drag. We have no time to lose. Pull yourself together

with some of what you have in your own flask; here is a cup, and here is a running brook. Let me be your friend as well as your mother's, Mr. Tempest. I have set my heart upon your going with us, and I cannot be refused."

Tempest sober and in health was a man of strong will, but Tempest shattered by weeks of heavy drinking was no match for the persistent force of character that belonged to Agatha Bonchurch. There was something in the steady gaze of her grey eyes that forced him to comply against his will. There was something too of faith and hope and encouragement in the words with which she strengthened his fainting heart. So she thought him good-looking! He began to wonder whether his nose was yet red from drink, or his eyes lustreless? She had said he possessed intellect! He began to recollect certain prizes won at school, certain essays accepted by reviews, and to wonder whether the spark of genius was really yet drowned out. Even as he gulped down the draught he held in his

hand a new sense of mental nausea affected him, a moment in which the brain rose superior to the palate, in which he recognized his own degradation by being brought face to face with what he might have been and what he was. Oh, how many a weak tippler might be saved if men and women would but show them the hidden riches of their own obscured humanity! if their fellows, instead of fixing the shadows caused by their loss of self-respect, and thereby increasing the desire for recklessness and oblivion, would but play upon those chords which are human still in the poor sufferer, flatter his vanity, arouse his pride, assume for him virtues even if he has them in but small degree, give him credit to his face for all and more than he possessed, before his fall, of wits and honesty and truth and love!

It is true that rats leave a falling house, and the human house never more nearly totters to its fall than when gutted and undermined by drink. But are human beings, bound together in the intimate fel-

lowship of an advanced civilization and a Christian creed, to follow the example of the vermin that infest their walls? Are men and women who would move out of the way to avoid treading on a worm, who shudder at the wanton slaying of even a wasp or a fly, whose emotions are wont to attain to the highest pitch of exasperated philanthropy at sight of an over-driven horse,—are these men and women to pass by on the other side at sight of a forlorn and friendless drunkard and find no place for pity in their human hearts? Alas! it would seem that in this matter humanity is no higher and no better than the rats!

It has been said, and said truly, that a man may sin against society not only seven times, but unto seventy times seven, and be forgiven, so long as his sin is not that of drunkenness. He may be a gambler, a liar, a debauchee. He may fleece the sons and ruin the daughters of the society in which he moves, and society will tolerate him still. He may be destitute of honour, of morals, of religion; he may even be caught card-

sharpening or appear as the vilest adulterer in the reports of the Divorce Court, and society will find reasons for condoning his villainy, while countless houses will still receive him with open arms, as a valued friend and an honoured guest! But let the breath of rumour once whisper “drunkard” through society’s ranks, a man is doomed! True or false, a fact or a libel, the effect of the report is as cruel, as relentless, as damning as is the imputation against a woman’s chastity; and as society hunts a sinning sister out into the streets to live or die as best she may, so does society, even in this age of so-called philanthropy, resolutely shut the doors of hope against the drunkard, openly, vauntingly following the departing footsteps of the Levite of the Scriptures, and passing by, with a gesture of disgust and contempt, on the other side!

But here, by Loftus Tempest’s side, was a woman who could dare to be a law to herself,—a woman, too, with keen insight into the feelings and failings of humanity, and a still keener desire to stand in any or every

gap wherever defence was needed for those wounded in the battle of life. That the sin of a drunken father had broken her mother's heart, and cut short her wasted and unhappy life, that that same sin had brought her herself to abject poverty, and consequent dependence on others for her daily bread, did not awaken in Agatha Bonchurch a hatred and a loathing for all who made life a hell to themselves and others by their self-inflicted curse. On the contrary, to a mind like hers, the knowledge of the cause of her own sufferings only made her the more resolute to combat that cause wherever she met it throughout the length and breadth of the land; to save, if it might be, her father's fellow-sufferers; to make even his vices and her mother's broken heart means whereby their daughter might redeem some unhappy ones here and there from the bondage of their own transgression.

Well she knew that not by cold disdain, nor by the shoulder-shrug of well-bred contempt, nor by reproach, could such as Loftus

Tempest be reclaimed. The more he was made to suffer, the more his loss of self-respect was borne in upon him, the more reckless and sullen and despairing would he become. That his state was the result of his own self-indulgence, what was that to her? What should, or could, it be to any one who had one spark of belief in the teaching of the Galilean, or in the love of an Almighty Father? Did Christ pause to ask the worthiness of lepers before He healed? No! Then why should she, or any human beings who intended in their heart of hearts to follow Christ? The young especially must be tempted to the paths of virtue by gilding for them the sober tints of truth. The foolish must be won to wisdom by illuminating the glories of the latter, not by dwelling on the folly of the fool.

The first dawnings of a high resolve beamed in Tempest's eyes as he placed his hand in Agatha's, saying,—

“I will go with you all to-day, and I will do my utmost in the way you wish. Bear with me if I am dull and irritable; for,

though you have given me hope, I am too full of despair for a moment's sunshine to dispel my gloom."

"Courage, Mr. Tempest," she replied. "Rome was not built in a day. You have true and warm friends round you at your beck and call; but the will to overcome must be your own, as will be the victory."

Then, smilingly and glad, she walked beside him up to the house-door.

CHAPTER XII.

BOLTON ABBEY.

SOME of the party were already seated in the drag when Agatha and Loftus Tempest gained the porch. Mrs. Tempest, already comfortably packed in a corner, with her back to the horses, gave Agatha a glance of unutterable relief and gratitude as Loftus sprang into the carriage. Lady Amory gave a little sniff, as a faint odour of spirits reached her too delicate olfactory organs, and applied her salts-bottle with more than her usual affectation. Mrs. Higgins looked sour and bade her daughter change her place, for Loftus had hurriedly placed himself next her.

Not one tittle of such by-play was lost

on either Agatha or Loftus. The latter got very red and again very white, and made as if he would descend from the drag, but found himself laughingly pushed back again by his sister, who had just come out of the house, and who, like a discreet young woman, understood at a glance, and took up her cue without prompting.

“I must fetch my sketch-book and a shawl,” said Agatha; “I will not keep you waiting a minute. Theodora, my paint-box is in your room; just come and show me where it is. I want a word with you,” she added hastily, as she pulled her friend into the house. “You see we have persuaded Mr. Tempest to accompany us. His poor mother is so pleased; but, Theodora, he will not be persuaded again if he finds no stronger attractions in society than in the bar of the hotel. Help us yourself, and get May to do the same—”

“Flirt with him, I suppose you mean,” said Theodora. “My dear, flirting is not in my line, especially with a man who drinks brandies and sodas all day.”

“Theodora, do be serious. It is not what is pleasant either for you or May or me. A fellow-creature is perishing, body and soul, from drink. He is young, he has talents, he has many qualities that may develope into a noble character, but he thinks himself an outcast from society; he is sensitive, and he sees people, girls especially, shrink from him with aversion—sometimes with disgust. This makes him drink the more, to drown the affront he feels he has no right to resent. Let him but see life in a different aspect, let him get some share of attention from us girls, and he will perhaps find other and better pleasures than the bottle. We shall not lose in dignity, Theodora, and surely we shall gain in charity.”

“Well, Agatha, you certainly are the queerest woman in the world. We shall have you joining the Good Templars next, and preaching from a tub by the roadside. However, you may consider I have accepted the shilling, and am duly enlisted in the cause, and you know me well enough to be sure I will never do anything by halves.

As to May," added Theodora, turning away so that Agatha could not see her face, "I do not think she will have any time to spare to-day for reclaiming the lost; at any rate, I cannot be the one to suggest it; you must offer her the shilling yourself."

The words were spoken bitterly, passionately, as if the speaker were striving to keep down a rising tide of emotion that threatened to be too strong for her. Agatha glanced keenly at her. The girl was evidently in trouble on her own account, but this was no time for inviting confidences. Hastily snatching up her sketch-book and paint-box, she preceded Theodora to the drag. The rest of the party had already settled themselves. Agatha and Theodora found themselves the last. All the set who were in the habit of moving round the Brasingham family were present. The Amorys and the Freemans, Tempests and Higginses, Vere Vereker and Gerald Tresilian, Captain Selfe and Julian Ferrand, and the Rev. Silas Monckton. Joyousness was not a prominent element; such conversation as there was was evidently

forced, and was chiefly carried on among the elders of the party. Mr. Brassingham himself was moody and silent; Theodora was excited and quite unlike herself, now rattling on in bright but inconsequent railery against everything and everybody, now sitting dumb and stiff and grim as her aunt Lavinia. Violet Champneys seldom lifted her eyes from her lap, while Ferrand never took his off her; Anne and May both wore that look of mysterious self-satisfaction that claims a knowledge in which the vulgar herd has no part. If one might judge from the amused expression on the faces of the vulgar herd, however, their little secrets were not so well concealed as they had fondly hoped. Nearly every one had some little game of his or her own to play, for which the crowded interior of a break was no fitting stage. Again, the number of the audience was quite disproportionate to the actors; nearly all were engaged in rehearsing their own parts, or watching the stage play of others, with a view to enhancing the effect of their own hits. Those to whom no

lovers' parts had been allotted by the fates had other plans and hopes and fears that occupied their minds. No one was sorry when the drive came to an end, and the party dispersed into the woods, by twos and threes, not to meet again till they joined forces for luncheon at the inn, which lies embowered in trees, and covered with roses, just outside the park.

Usually Frank Freeman was wont to rid himself of more troublesome claimants for his services as a retriever and beast of burden by devoting himself to his friend Theodora, whose wants at the hands of any man in a country ramble were of the smallest. For Freeman's feelings for womanhood in general had but little of sentiment or romance. If he had any chivalry in his nature, it was not called forth except on very rare occasions, and even then it took the form of compassion for the weak and worship for the strong, rather than the sort of passion that is kindled by the wounds of Cupid's arrows. In his attachments to his men friends he was ardent and enthusiastic.

To old people and children he was full of sympathy and care and kindliness. With all these he was ever a prime favourite ; but the very depth of his convictions on such subjects as women's rights destroyed the sense of protection towards the gentler sex which is so largely felt by most men, especially men of the athletic and manly type, to which Frank Freeman pre-eminently belonged. As a rule the affected helplessness of young women of his class made them, to him, vapid, uninteresting specimens of humanity. The very belief that girls were physically and mentally fit to cope with men, to be their equals and companions in the race of life, bruised and deadened that tender blossom of protective love which has its root in ages when women's rights were unknown.

Theodora was a woman of splendid physique, able in all ways to hold her own, and requiring help from no one. She would give any man a lead in the hunting-field, and pull a strong stroke in an out-rigged pair. She was an expert fencer, having learnt of one

of the first masters of the art in Paris, and she could play a sufficiently good game at whist or billiards to prevent any male antagonist from going to sleep. For this sort of woman Frank Freeman had as boundless an admiration as he would have had a boundless compassion for some pale, back-broken cripple, whose only glimpse of the external world was obtained from a Bath-chair. But all sentiment of love was as far removed from the one as the other. Freeman wondered to himself, sometimes, what madness it could be which afflicted one after another of his companions in such unaccountable fashion, and whether the apparent folly was really as foolish as it looked; but on the whole he thanked his stars that his brain was yet untouched and his blood unstirred by anything that wore a petticoat.

To-day, however, some instinct told him that Theodora had other fish to fry, so he threw himself down on a bank until he could see where his company would be most desirable, not without a secret hope that the

manœuvre might eventuate in his finding himself alone.

Theodora Brassingham stood by him. She, too, was evidently waiting to see how the rest would dispose of themselves. There was a nervous unrest about the girl to-day that Freeman was at a loss to account for.

The elder portion of the party, including Lady Catherine and Lady Amory, Mrs. Tempest and Mrs. Higgins, escorted by Mr. Brassingham and the Rev. Silas, agreed to remain at the little inn to make all requisite arrangements for luncheon.

If Vere Vereker was *gauche*, he was neither shy nor backward. He meant to be Anne Brassingham's companion for the day, and her husband in due course, if circumstances permitted; and once having come to this conclusion, he stalked away at Anne's side like a man in possession.

Ferrand, too, in a more lover-like and impetuous fashion, appropriated the society of Miss Violet Champneys. Frank thought for a moment, as he watched Mr. Brassingham, that the latter would have aban-

doned the old ladies, and would have "cut" in between the woman he worshipped and the ardent young lover who was threatening to become a far more formidable rival than the absent Charlie. But, no. Mr. Brassingham only gave one swift glance out of his great brown eyes at the pair, then he turned aside with others towards the rose-embowered inn.

Eric Amory was standing a little apart under the shadow of the trees, weaving a wreath of wild flowers he had just plucked at May's desire; while she stood watching him, looking up with childish glee at the flowery chaplet in his hands. A pretty picture truly; as a ray of sunshine, streaming through the boughs, lit up the auburn tresses of the maid, and the young man's golden curls. Both were so fair, so young, so untouched as yet by care or sorrow.

There was a bold frankness in Eric's great blue eyes, as they merrily challenged the deep violet orbs of his companion. In every line and curve of their youthful figures there were grace, and vigour, and shapeliness.

“Cupid seems to have found his Psyche,” said Frank to Theodora. “What a pretty pair they look! Now would be the time to paint them, while Eric is crowning May with flowers.”

Theodora made no reply. Frank glanced up at her. Her face was white to the lips, her great dark eyes were fixed, indeed, upon the pair of whom he spoke; but they were expressionless. She suddenly seemed to feel she was being watched, for she started violently and turned away, as the blood rushed over face and neck and brow, at imagining her thoughts discovered.

Alas! too truly had Eric Amory's friends nicknamed him “Cupid.” The shafts of the merry little god had gone home here as elsewhere, deeply—ah! so deeply, that if plucked out it seemed as though the life-blood of the victim must rush through the gaping wound.

A pang of pity shot through Frank Freeman's heart, as he took in the truth at a glance. That any other woman should fall in love with “Cupid” Amory's bright

beauty and winning ways would not in the least have surprised him ; but that Theodora Brassingham should have fallen a victim to his arrows was indeed, to Freeman's mind, astounding. Everybody was attracted by Theodora. She had received offers of marriage by scores, even though she had but been out of the schoolroom during the last three years. Many were fired to madness by her splendid beauty ; among hunting men she was a sort of empress ; city magnates had more than once laid a princely fortune at her feet ; and now she had loved at last a beardless golden-haired boy, a merry blue-eyed youth, who not only was wont to treat her as a sister, but who, if any trust could be put in appearances, was already half engaged to her sister May ! Poor Theodora ! She had staked her all, and she had lost. Another than Frank Freeman, too, had surveyed and understood the scene. Agatha Bonchurch was now no longer at a loss to understand why Theodora could not herself enlist May's services on Loftus Tempest's behalf, or why her refusal

to do so had been couched in a tone so bitter and so sad. More than ever did the heart of this sympathetic girl go out to the haughty maiden who, she plainly saw, was doomed to suffer all the worst pangs of wounded love and jealousy of a sister's triumph.

"Let us sketch the ruins from the opposite side of the water," said Agatha to Theodora. "We can get across close by, by the stepping-stones. Come, Mr. Tempest, and you, Mr. Freeman—you are not going to lounge all day on this bank, are you? Who else will join us?"

The remnant appealed to comprised only Gerald Tresilian and Miss Higgins. The rest of the party had dispersed in various directions. Even "Cupid and Psyche" had disappeared through the trees. Poor Miss Higgins was not a girl for whose society young men were wont to pine. Her manners were gushing, not to say silly; she was sandy-haired and freckled. To Agatha Bonchurch, however, she had become speedily attached, relying on the poor companion for that sympathy which elsewhere

she failed to find. When opportunity offered she usually tacked herself on to Anne Brasingham, who proved less of a foil to her own unattractiveness than the other girls, but Anne to-day was better engaged, and Miss Higgins was thankful to find herself included in the sketching party. Besides this, she entertained a furtive admiration for Mr. Tresilian, to whom all women were precisely alike, to judge by his courtesy to, and distrust of, the whole sex. If Tresilian showed any preference for one sort of woman more than another, it was for young married women who were sufficiently fond of their husbands not to look for attention from other men. Girls and old women equally bored him, and to be bored was the one thing in life Gerald Tresilian dreaded and avoided. Young married women, however, being conspicuous by their absence on the present occasion, he was perfectly careless as to who fell to his lot—as well *gauche*, freckled Miss Higgins as any other.

Freeman, anxious to learn from Theodora her opinion about her brother's quarrel with

his father, walked on in advance with her. As he was doubting how to approach the subject without betraying Mr. Bringham's confidence, she suddenly plunged into family affairs by abruptly saying,—

“What do you think, Frank, of all this tomfoolery between Anne and Vere Vereker?”

“I did not know it was considered ‘tomfoolery,’ Theodora. I suppose he either has proposed to her or is simply waiting his opportunity. Why? Don't you approve?”

“I believe they will be the most miserable couple in existence if they marry,” she answered. “I have done my best to stop it; but Anne is not a woman to care one jot for other people's opinions when she has made up her mind to a thing; and I quite believe she will marry Vere Vereker if he asks her. What possible happiness can come of such a marriage? He is in love with Anne's money; she is ready and willing to take any man who will make her independent of a home she has learnt to hate. She and papa quarrel from morning

till night. When Charlie is at home, then he and she are like cat and dog. I do not wonder she should wish to be quit of home. But to throw herself away on that galvanized mummy of a man! Bah! it is too revolting and idiotic!"

"I have said before, Theodora, I think you are hard on Vereker. Why should he not be in love with Anne for her own sake? I do believe the man is an honest sort of fellow, while you would make him out a mere fortune-hunter. He is truthful, conscientious, and hard-working. He is a man of excellent morality, sound judgment, and pure life; surely these qualities should count for something in your summing-up of his character. Besides, he comes of a good old family enough."

"Family! Fiddlesticks! What do we care whether his father were a count or a costermonger? The man is a narrow-minded prig—exact, precise, pedantic. He is mean in all things, stingy, and ungenerous. He has meant marrying money all along, and flew at higher game than Anne, to my

certain knowledge before he paid court to her; and then, Frank, he is so hideous. Fancy being kissed to an accompaniment of jangling teeth, and being clawed by those bird-like hands of his! Bah! if I were Anne, I would rather marry the butcher's boy."

"Vereker is certainly very plain," Frank answered. "I suppose the mitigation of human ugliness demands that he should marry a fine woman like Anne. There is plenty of her, even if she is not pretty in face; and her vigour will compensate for his feebleness. What does your father say to the probability of the match?"

"He is too sick of Anne's temper to veto anything which will take her out of the family. She is a sort of ponderous obstruction to domestic peace. You can neither persuade nor compel her. You might as well argue with a statue, or rave against a mountain. Vere Vereker has a will of his own, too,—a sniggling, cat-like tenacity of purpose that will fight Anne's dull obstinacy to the death when once the marriage-knot is tied. And then what is to be the end of it?"

A judicial separation, arising from incompatibility of temper, without even the merciful relief of a divorce. I am not very fond of Anne, Frank, even though she is my sister, and I positively loathe Vere Vereker; but I do not wish either of them to endure such a fate as will, I feel sure, be theirs in the married state."

"The future you draw for them is not an agreeable one, certainly, Theodora; still, if they have both made up their minds, I do not believe any one's interference will have the smallest effect. The only thing to be done is to tie up Anne's fortune so that Vere cannot touch it without her."

"And so tie up their unhappy lives till death parts them," added Theodora; "for, be assured, Vere will consent to no separation by which he loses her money. She will drive him wild by her untidiness, her carelessness, her want of method and order; while his little niggling ways, his petty aims and subterfuges, will have the same effect on her. Heaven help them when they are once man and wife!

“But I wanted to speak to you, Frank, about quite a different matter,” added Theodora, after a pause. “It must be evident to you, as it is to every one else here, that Mr. Ferrand has fallen head over ears in love with Violet Champneys. My father is usually active enough in such matters in either forwarding or thwarting love-affairs; but in this, where he is so evidently the only person who has a right to interfere, he utterly refuses to say a word one way or the other. I asked him yesterday point blank whether he approved of what was going on, but his only reply was that Violet must be left to make her own choice. Who is this Mr. Ferrand? Even the Tempests, who are more intimate with him than any one else, have not the remotest notion where he sprang from. He may be but the merest adventurer. He is a splendid fellow to look at, certainly, but I think Violet is more afraid of him than in love with him after all.”

“I think you would do well, Theodora, to invite Miss Champneys’s confidence more

than you do. Anne dislikes her, and makes no secret of her dislike. May is scarcely more than a child, and so Miss Champneys has no woman friend in whom to confide. You can hardly expect her to whisper her soul's secrets to your aunt Lavinia. Now, tell me frankly, do you think Charlie's absence from home has anything whatever to do with Miss Violet Champneys?"

"I know nothing for certain, Frank, but I suspect a great deal. Beneath Violet's calm manner there is much warmth of nature, and, without being actually deceitful, she has always discovered a great aptitude for the mysterious which borders on intrigue. I do not mean this in a bad sense, but I think she has quite a genius for ferreting out things that would lie hidden for ever from most people's eyes. Mind you, I do not think there is any real harm in her, but I do think she has that secretive sort of mind which often breeds mischief unwittingly out of mystery. And a mystery there is between her and my brother which I cannot fathom. Until lately I had believed she loved Charlie,

though she is of too reserved a nature to show it.

“Just before we came away from Brasingham she declined every one’s society in her walks and rambles. It is my belief that about that time, in some way that I cannot guess, she found out, or fancied she had found out, reasons why Charlie could never be anything to her. She never mentions him now, not even to me; and whereas she used to be more affectionate towards papa than any of his own children, now she seems to avoid him like the plague.”

“If Charlie loves her, and there is no real difficulty in the way, why does he not come forward like a man?” asked Frank.

“I cannot fathom the mystery,” answered Theodora. “I only wish we were back again at Brasingham, and then there might be some chance of unravelling it. Here everything seems to go wrong. Papa gets more morose and depressed every day, and I think his bursts of temper become more and more violent. I am not given to being

frightened, but sometimes he makes me shiver. But, with regard to Violet, do you really think it would be the slightest use for me to speak to her? I am so afraid of making matters worse."

"I think the poor girl is waiting and anxious for sympathy," said Frank. "Her face and manner alike show how much she is suffering. As to Charlie, since he will not write, I suppose I shall have to hunt him down when we get back south, and get from his own lips what all this worry is about."

While they had been talking the rest of their party had separated from them. Gerald Tresilian, in hopes of meeting with others who could dilute, as it were, the insipidity and silliness of Miss Higgins, who was boring him nearly to extinction, had already reached the stepping-stones, over which Miss Higgins, with much affectation and timid titters, was being duly conveyed.

Agatha was determined not to allow her charge to get too low in his spirits, and had purposely held back that Loftus Tempest

might invigorate nature with a surreptitious “nip.” Her object attained, they soon caught up the rest.

Mr. Brassingham, meanwhile, having deposited the elder ladies at the inn, strolled forth alone into the woods, in a humour both grim and sad.

That sort of love which embraces more pain than pleasure had come to John Brassingham for the first time in his life—for the first time, and at an age which wanted but a few years of his half century. The love of a hale man in ripest maturity, while both vigour and intellect are as yet untouched by the hand of Time, is perhaps the strongest, most enduring love that can exist. For passion’s force is well-nigh spent; a man at fifty ceases to indulge in glowing dreams of married happiness.

Once before John Brassingham had loved. In the first hot days of passionate youth he had met, by accident, a girl still younger than himself. His passion had been as ardently returned, and harm had come to her by him. The sister of a prize-fighter,

she had been apprenticed to a fashionable milliner at the west-end of London, but through John Brassingham she had been compelled to leave her situation, and had gone upon the stage. When first she had listened to John Brassingham's love she had not known his position. Her heart was stormed by his magnificent person and insinuating address. Then, when she found herself about to become a mother, she had pleaded with him to marry her, but he had put her off; and when she found out who he was her heart had died within her lest she might never be his wife.

Had John Brassingham been a penniless outcast, had his calling been that of a drayman, she would have loved him, and loved him honestly, all the same. Where languid sprigs of aristocracy had failed to rouse her love this plebeian Brassingham, this iron-founder's son, had stirred her to her heart's depths. The man's magnificent humanity, failing where she failed, sinning where she sinned, yet sharing all the vigour and intensity of her nature, had swept all before

it. Oh, that he would marry her! That was the one aim and object of her life. She had talent, she had beauty; she would rise to be foremost among actresses, she would be worthy of the place of John Brassingham's wife yet. But would he yield her that coveted title?

Perhaps, had their *liaison* been kept secret, in the noontide heat of his passion he might have married her; but with his father there was no appeal. The old iron-founder was wrought like his own minerals, hard and inflexible. His will was absolute. He was not the man to receive an actress as his daughter, even had she been spotless as snow. He was willing that provision should be made for her, and for the two sons she had borne to John Brassingham, on the sole condition that she should never set foot in England again from the time of his son's marriage for five-and-twenty years; after that she might do as she pleased; but if by her presence she should harass his son and his son's wife, his solicitors had orders to stop the allowance, even if the cast-off

woman and her sons were, by so doing, reduced to beggary.

Then the unfortunate girl had given in. For the sake of her two boys, his boys, the sons of the man who had become to her all the world and more, she left the country, and, true to her agreement, had never since touched its shores. But had she forgotten? No! In Paris and Vienna, in Berlin and St. Petersburg, the English actress had won European fame. But wherever she went she carried the love of her life, the image of John Brassingham. She contrived to keep herself well informed of all that John Brassingham said or did.

So the long years had sped. Brilliant had been her triumphs, world-wide her fame, but still she hugged her lost love to her heart. She amassed money; she acquired influence; her character during her long career on the various stages of the Continental cities had been beyond reproach. Her beauty had faded, it is true, but she had gained in grace and refinement what she had lost in youth and roundness of form;

at forty-five she was a handsome woman still, tall and dark, with lustrous flashing eyes. In Vienna she had heard of the death of John Brassingham's unloved wife, and a wild, half-despairing hope had surged up into her heart that perhaps she might be dear to him still. Should she return to England, and see if indeed her old power over him was dead? No; for her children's sake she would bide her time, till the twenty-five years were fully past. Then, oh, then she must see his face once more.

And she came. The instant the term of her exile was at an end she came to the land to which she had been a stranger for five-and-twenty years; to the city where, for her, sin had cast out innocence, and love, in its turn, had cast out sin—back once more to London.

In various ways she had gleaned information of all that was going on at Brassingham Park, and of its inmates, and their hopes and fears, and loves and hates. That Charles Brassingham was ousted from his father's house, she knew; and where he was

she knew, and of the exodus of the Brasingham family from Surrey to the Yorkshire hills.

Five-and-twenty years had she hungered for the sight of one face, for the touch of one hand, for the sound of one voice. While the man's wife had lived, and the sea had been between her and the idol of her youth, she had borne up with patience, even with cheerfulness. But now a restless fever preyed upon her. She could no longer wait, would herself go down to Yorkshire, and, herself unseen, contrive to see the man who was the father of her sons.

And what were the feelings of John Brasingham towards the woman whom he had so nearly married in his earliest youth? Truth to tell, he hardly ever thought of her at all. He had seen his father's wisdom in making her allowance dependent upon her absence from the country. He was glad that neither she nor her boys should have had any opportunity of becoming thorns in his side, or of making his domestic strife more full of wrangle than was his daily

portion. They were amply provided for; that he knew for certain. Beyond, he thought little and cared less. Once married, even to a woman whom he disliked, the exigencies of his position demanded that all connexion with a cast-off mistress should be stopped. Then came children — legitimate children—year after year; children who bore his name and would inherit his vast wealth. Some of these he loved, some he did not; but anyhow, not even curiosity as to the paths in life followed by his bastard sons had disturbed the mind of John Brassingham.

Gradually, too, even the memory of those early days of illicit passion had faded somewhat from John Brassingham's mind, or, if called up at all into shape and substance, only through his fears lest Charles should follow too thoroughly in his own footsteps, and disgrace his own generation by some low marriage which he, John Brassingham, might have no power to stop.

Assuredly a man's sins find him out. Sooner or later, in youth or in age, the hidden wrong creeps out into the light, and

wreaks its vengeance on the evil-doer. Little did John Brassingham think, as he strode forth into the woods of Bolton Abbey, what a network of sorrow and misery was woven about his feet by his own sin of long ago, or how near was the hour of retribution for passions indulged in five-and-twenty years ago.

Mr. Brassingham crashed on through the tall brackens that clothed the forest glades, on through the stately foxgloves that reached his shoulder as he brushed them by. His heart was heavy; for with his great desire to possess this girl, this fair-haired Violet, for his wife, had grown a real unselfish love, at least, so far as it was possible to a man like him to lose sight of self; and this new-born wish to make another happy, even by his own unhappiness, strengthened day by day and hour by hour, as was natural it should, when passion was made subordinate to a higher form of love.

From reports of Charles's conduct which had reached him, Mr. Brassingham honestly believed that his own son was no fit husband

for Violet Champneys. This being the case, why should he not marry her himself? And often as he put this question to himself, so often was the answer borne in upon his heart, "Because she loves your son." But if the man she loved had been another than his own flesh and blood, would he for one moment have been justified in allowing so young and inexperienced a girl to throw herself away upon her first young fancy? No. Then why should he sacrifice to his own son, who by all accounts was not worthy, a girl whom he himself loved heart and soul, and of whom he believed he was worthy.

CHAPTER XIII.

MADAME JULIA FERRAND.

To the dangerous fascination exercised over Violet by Julian Ferrand, Mr. Brassingham had been by no means blind; but he was willing—nay, anxious—to give this fascination scope for action, so that if Violet still held by her promise to become his wife, he might feel that Ferrand, a young and handsome man, had been allowed to do his best to win her, and had failed.

Yes. John Brassingham felt himself to be in evil case; and the more deeply he pondered on it, the worse became his position in his own eyes. He was too honest at heart to try to blind himself by plausible subterfuges. If Violet loved Charlie, and nothing

were proved against Charlie sufficiently bad to prevent such love being consummated by marriage, why then, he would be a selfish scoundrel to make his own desires and Violet's promise stand in the way of the young lovers. On the other hand, Violet appeared to have given her consent to being his wife upon very matured consideration; and yet John Brassingham's own heart warned him that the girl did not love him. Did she love Julian Ferrand? and if so was he bound to consult her feelings alone, and wipe himself out of love's map once for all? Another day should not pass before this last question was answered, at any rate. Violet should be made to state in plainest terms whether Ferrand occupied any place in her affections or not.

Quick thought begets quick action; Mr. Brassingham's thoughts had been in a tumultuous whirl, and his paces had kept up with his emotions till even his sturdy limbs were tired. Close by he discerned a huge moss-covered boulder overhanging the stream; it looked a tempting resting-place. He turned

towards it, and found, to his surprise, that the further side of it was already occupied by a woman dressed in black, who, with her chin resting on her hands, was looking out dreamily over the river towards the ruins of Bolton Abbey.

She glanced up at him as he approached. He noticed that her eyes were very large and dark, and that her thick black hair grew low on her brow, and was here and there tinged with grey. Then, unwilling to intrude upon her privacy, he was passing on to find a halting-place elsewhere, when she suddenly rose to her feet, and, holding out both her hands, said, in accents of agonized expectancy, and catching her breath between each word, "You have not—forgotten me—quite—John?"

He wheeled sharply round upon her, and their eyes met. The expression of unbounded astonishment on his face was replaced by a lightning-flash of recognition, followed by dark clouds of anger, shrinking, and annoyance; but no word passed his lips.

"You have not—forgotten me—quite—

John?" she repeated beseechingly, letting her voice dwell with a caressing tenderness on his Christian name. "I—have so longed—to see you once again." She advanced a step towards him; her trembling hands were extended with open palms, as though in supplication; the smile on her parted lips was so full of tears and suppressed, unutterable woe that any heart in a man's breast, save that of the stern old iron-master's son, must have yielded to its power.

Not so the heart of John Brassingham. To him the intervening years since last they met were void of love, for her as for all other women. The passion he had felt for her in early youth had been passion, nothing more; the strongest passion that a vigorous, hot-blooded youth can feel, perhaps, but containing no higher elements which could blossom into love. All sentiment, all emotion of the mind, all tender subtleties of painful joy and joyous pain, had formed no part of John Brassingham's passion for Julia Ferris, the faded woman who now, with outstretched hands, pleaded only for a recog-

nition of the past, and some kind word of welcome from the father of her sons.

He stood frowning, with furrowed brow and lips compressed, mute.

“It is I—I, Julia Ferris,” she urged, in a gasping, half-suffocated voice. “I, who have worshipped you through these many weary years; I, who made way for another woman to be your wife; I, who have been in exile for your sake; I, who am still the mother of our sons. John! speak to me. I have longed and hungered and thirsted for one sight of your face, one kind word from your lips; I have prayed, day by day, and week by week, through all these weary years, that I might be once more clasped in your arms before I died.”

But John Brassingham stood as one turned to stone. He had known the woman in her actress days; he believed she was acting still. Never at any time had the image of Julia Ferris filled his heart—it had but caught his sensual fancy; and now—when a real, all-absorbing love had at last taken possession of his soul for Violet—was

certainly the worst of all ill times for the memory of a passion of years ago to be forced upon his unresponsive mind.

The woman had remembered; the man had forgotten. From the woman time had purified the dross; to the man time had but tarnished the gilding of what had once been lovely in his sight.

The man once more, as he stood towering in colossal power and strength, the woman tremblingly besought.

“John, I want nothing from you—nothing. Neither for myself nor for my sons. You have already provided for us well. But I have loved you, John—loved you with all my heart and soul and mind and strength—and so I love you still. Oh, say some word of kindness to me, John, even for old times’ sake, even if you but hate me now in my old age! Oh, remember how you loved me once!”

She tottered forward and sank at his feet, clasping his knees with her arms. Then at last he spoke. His words came thick and harsh, more with anger than emotion.

“I did not know you at first,” he said. “I do now. I am at a complete loss to imagine what object you can have in seeking me again. It is five-and-twenty years since all between us was over. If you want a larger allowance you can apply through the lawyer. At the same time, I may as well say at once that any attempt to interfere with me or mine, or to identify yourself with us, will only have the effect of depriving you and your sons of all support from the Brassingham estates.”

His tone was cold and measured. His words stabbed her through and through. He stooped, not to take her in his arms, not to whisper some gracious words of hope and peace, but only to disengage her clinging arms from his sturdy limbs, and free himself from her embrace.

She had staked all upon one venture, and she had lost. She had heard he had not loved his wife. She had thought, poor woman, that now that wife was dead some chord of memory might be touched on finding that his youth's mistress still lived,

still loved him better than all the world beside. And, now that the longed-for moment of reunion had come, no word of recognition was her portion, no look of kindness, not even a kiss upon her brow; and yet she had borne him children!

She shrank from him and cowered on the mossy sward, and moaned.

“Let us have an end of this,” said Mr. Brassingham, getting more and more angry as the full possibilities of discovery dawned upon him. “All sentiment is out of place between us two. We have been strangers for nearly a quarter of a century; we have only known of each other’s existence through the family solicitor, and yet you seem to fancy you have but to return to England to fill the place you occupied when you and I were young. I gave you credit for more sense, Julia. If you are merely playing a part, with an intention I cannot at present discover, believe me, the cloak of simulated affection is not one that will blind John Brassingham. If you have been feeding an over sensitive fancy on hopes of finding an

undying passion still burning for you in me, why, the sooner you get rid of such nonsense, the better. We are no longer boy and girl; for aught I know, we may be grand-parents. Come, be sensible. Tell me, what of the boys?"

He moved as though to lift her from the ground, where she lay all of a heap, her face buried in her hands. But at his touch she shrank away. She had hungered for love, she had found aversion. Beauty and youth and fame had waned and diminished and disappeared. Love alone had lived, and now love was murdered. With a heart-breaking moan she rose slowly from the ground. Her great black eyes had a hunted look in them now, a look as of some animal in mortal pain. She swayed to and fro as she strove to rise. He would have supported her, but she waved him off.

"Touch me not," she said. "All these long years I have carried the knowledge of my shame bravely, believing that a day would come when you would acknowledge my claim to your love, though not to the

position of your wife. Had I found any spark of affection left in your breast for the woman whose beauty pleased you well enough in other days—had I found even the kindliness that any man possessing a heart at all must have felt towards the mother of his own sons—I would have gladly sunk into the oblivion required of your cast-off mistress; I would have watched your career with the eyes of love that cannot die; I would have helped build up the lives of your children into fame and honour and success, even though they called another woman mother, for whom you deserted me; but you have shown me what you are, and what you can be, how hard, how pitiless, how cruel. I have lived for my art, it is true; I am famous in all lands. Under my assumed name of Giulia Ferretti, I have won laurels on every stage. Why? Because I was borne up by hope and love. You have slain my hope this day, John Brassingham; this day you have slain my love.”

She turned from him, and descended the hill, her whole bearing and appearance

altered. John Brassingham was somewhat staggered at the turn affairs had taken, certainly. It is not an every-day occurrence in an elderly Englishman's life to go out for a solitary walk and fall in with a cast-off mistress of twenty-five years ago; neither usual nor pleasant—at least, so it seemed to Mr. Brassingham.

Many a man would have been moved by the dramatic element of the incident, even apart from any more sentimental aspect it might possess; another might have been roused to a tender interest by simply the knowledge that he had been, and still was, so passionately beloved. But it was different with Mr. Brassingham. A man's enemies are as likely to be right in their judgment of a man's character as his friends, and it has been said before that those who loved him not were of opinion that he was coarse or harsh, sensual or brutal, as their expression corresponded to their degree of dislike. In the present instance, Mr. Brassingham had fully borne out his enemies' worst opinions of him. He had shown himself harsh and brutal,

but, after all, had he not been fairly true to his nature? The man was nothing more or less than a magnificent animal—vigorous, muscular, high-spirited—who, according to his kind, had desired, had possessed, and had tired of another animal as splendid in physique as himself, but with the additional misfortune of a heart that could learn to love and to break.

John Brassingham had not a spark of sentiment in his nature. He was a man who relegated to the depths of oblivion all such mental superfluities as conscience, repentance, regrets, or remorse. He considered them all as forms of “nerves” more or less shattered and deranged. For himself, he was not troubled with nerves, nor, consequently, with conscience, or remorse, or any of that ugly brood. Mr. Brassingham was wont to assert that his immunity from troubles of that nature was the natural result of his plebeian birth, and he made known his opinion that people would be much less at the mercy of fanciful diseases of either mind or body had they had

the benefit of a vigorous but plebeian ancestry.

That a woman, whatever might have been her connexion with him five-and-twenty years ago, should appear suddenly to him in the wilds of a Yorkshire forest, and cling to his knees in a melo-dramatic manner, with tears and sighs and reproaches, simply had a farcical effect upon a man of John Brassingham's practical nature. He would, indeed, have laughed over the episode, had he not been made so angry by the feeling of danger to his peace in the possession of Violet, should this old love of his take it into her head to make public confession of her wrongs. A man may be as practical as he pleases, and as rich as Croesus to boot, and yet find it awkward to face an outraged woman, anxious to declaim against him, and a couple of grown-up sons somewhere in the background, of whose appearance he is absolutely ignorant.

As Mr. Brassingham swung along homeward to the inn, his mind was more busied in wondering what manner of men these boys had turned out than in any regrets

for the woman's life he had ruined. Doubtless, he thought, he should not be quit of her yet, and at the next opportunity he would make inquiries for the two sons she had borne to him so many years ago. But first of all he would have Violet's final answer, even this very day, before the sun went down. Somehow his keen quest of Violet seemed whetted by his adventure in the forest. Mr. Brassingham was not accustomed to opposition or reproaches; indeed it needed but resistance to set his will like iron. As he strode along, crashing through the lofty bracken, he seemed to smell resistance in the very air, and his mental muscle, as it were, gathered itself up to battle, with every sinew taut and eager for the fray. It was in a very combative and aggressive mood that Mr. Brassingham at length reached the inn at the edge of the park, and could he have been possessed of the gift of second sight, and followed Madame Julia in her homeward wandering, his mood would probably have been more combative and aggressive still.

CHAPTER XIV.

VIOLET'S LOVERS—THE ADVENTURER.

THOUGH Madame Julia had come from the Continent to London, and again from London to Yorkshire, for the especial purpose of seeing Mr. Brassingham again, yet the meeting in the forest had been, in itself, purely accidental. Knowing that the Brassinghams were staying at the Wells, Madame Julia had purposely taken up her abode some distance away, at a wayside farm-house, about half-way between the Wells and Bolton Abbey. She had reckoned that thus she could combine the seclusion she desired with opportunities for meeting Mr. Brassingham without the knowledge of the rest

of his family. As yet she had determined on no plan of action; indeed she had been but a few days at the farm-house when the chance meeting of this morning had come about. The farm-house in which she lodged overlooked the road from Ilkley to Bolton Abbey, and she had seen a break dash by with a party of people from the Wells. Curiosity had prompted her to wend her way towards the Abbey, and in passing through the forest by a short cut, she had paused to rest on the mossy boulder where so strange a chance had brought her face to face with her lover of long ago. The eyes of love are sharp. She knew him at a glance; few men walked with such a swinging, guardsmanlike stride; few had so firm a footstep, so erect a carriage, so defiant an air; and when he came closer and she looked once more upon the bold brown eyes she had loved so well, she knew indeed that John Brassingham, and no other, was the man who stood before her. Ah! how that very morning had she peered close into the mirror, vainly hoping to find some

trace of the beauty that had once made John Brassingham her slave! And he had not even taken her outstretched hand! Not one word of kindness, such as even he might have accorded to a beggar, had he vouchsafed to her who had borne him two sons!

Sorrow and anger tore at her heart-strings as she hastened down the wooded slope of the hill, and sought the pathway by the stream that would lead her back to the farm-house. But she had not gone far, before the sound of voices made her pause and start. Surely one voice was the voice of one she knew—yet how should he be here? Yes, surely she knew those tones—tones so deep and full and manly, pitched now in a key of earnest entreaty and appeal.

She moved nearer to the spot whence the sounds proceeded. A thick belt of rowan trees and copper-beeches completely hid her from sight, but she could see close down by the stepping-stones across the stream two figures seated, a tall, dark, stalwart man

and a fair beautiful woman with auburn hair.

She knew the man for Julian Ferrand; her eldest, her darling son. How came he here, and in such company? Certainly many weeks had passed since she had had tidings of him, and when last he had written to her abroad he had expressed himself uncertain of his autumn movements. Strange indeed if, ignorant of his real relationship to the Brassinghams, he should have fallen in with them on his travels! But the girl with the auburn hair—who was she? Was it possible she should be one of John Brassingham's daughters, and Julian not know the relationship between them? Heaven forefend!

The faces of the pair were turned towards her. She could distinctly hear their words.

"Listen," her son was saying, "I can no longer wait unanswered. Day by day, hour by hour, my love for you has increased, till I am no longer master of myself. But I am not a man who can be fooled; nor am I one who whines for a love that may be already

bestowed elsewhere. I am rough, I know, I have but little fortune, and I am a wanderer upon the face of the earth; but I love you with all a strong man's strength. Do not torture me. If you love me, say so; my life shall then be at your feet, as my love must ever be; but if some other, more fortunate than I, has been before me in the field, then let me go, and hide my broken manhood in some other land."

He paused; his face was working with passion and hopes and fears. The girl twisted her fingers in and out, but sat silent, spell-bound by his almost fierce avowal. She seemed half frightened by his intensity, by the electric light that blazed in his great dark eyes, by the quick, passionate sentences that could scarce find utterance from their very earnestness.

"Mr. Ferrand," at last she said, looking up straight into his fierce and hungry face, "I will be honest with you; as honest as I can be with myself. But you must have a little patience with me, if my calmer nature cannot keep pace with yours. It is not fair

for any man to expect that a question he may have taken days or even weeks to make up his mind to ask, must needs be answered by a word or look on the instant of his bidding. A woman's feelings cannot leap to meet a man's with any sudden burst, until his love for her is known; nor even then, unless her own heart has let her know what sort of question she might expect. I did not know—our acquaintance has been too short, our meetings too infrequent, for me to have guessed the nature of the question you have asked me now."

"Surely, surely you have seen, you must have seen," he urged, "how my eyes have doated on your sweet presence; how never willingly have I been a moment from your side; how, since I came here and first saw you, a madness, a frenzy—call it what you will—has possessed me, to feast myself upon your face, your words, your looks! Surely no woman can be blind to love!"

Violet burst into tears. The intensity of this man's fierce passion was too much for her. The way in which his words came hot

and thick, like devouring flames, scorched her with their fervid heat. The strange, almost superhuman force of his marvellous magnetic power, enveloped and well-nigh overwhelmed her.

“You will not understand me,” she gasped between her sobs. “I cannot give you any answer now.” Then her maidenly pride rebelled against his loving coercion, and she added, with more spirit, “But you have no right to insist upon my saying ‘Yes’ or ‘No,’ because it pleases you to have an answer now. I am not used to be made love to after this violent fashion. You must give me time.”

A grim smile stole over Julian Ferrand’s swarthy face at Violet’s arch acknowledgment that others than he had entered the lists of love; but he only said,—

“Perhaps to your other lovers your answer has not been a matter of life and death.”

At these words a thrill of vivid recollection rushed through Violet’s brain, of how one other, not so long ago, had wooed her as

fiercely, as passionately, as devotedly, to all seeming, as this one was wooing her now. She remembered how to that other she had let her heart slip out of her safe keeping, and how, after a brief space of hope and love and joy she had seen sights and had heard words which had closed her heart against his wildest prayers.

But was she to resist all love's advances because one lover had played her false? Was she, in her tender youth and budding bloom, to listen to no other vows, because one man's vows were broken? Perhaps not. Yet in the very first anguish of her poor, crushed heart had she not voluntarily given away her hand where she knew her heart was not? Had she not accorded to the father, whom she believed unforsworn, the boon she had refused the son, whom she believed forsworn?

As all this rushed through Violet's brain the sense of her own misery overwhelmed her. She perfectly understood the magnetic influence of the man who was even at this moment fascinating her by his electrical

power. She had over and over again said to herself during her brief acquaintance with him that she believed him capable of obtaining an influence over her sensitive nature which might amount to a spell she would not have the power to withstand. She knew it was not love she felt for him; but if not love, what was it? She knew it was not love, because it was far different to the passion in her heart for that other one with the dark blue eyes, whose words were even now ringing in her ears, pleading, reproaching, upbraiding, but all to no purpose, because she believed that he had played her false. But for Ferrand she felt, and to herself she owned it, a nameless fascination. He intoxicated her senses, he overwhelmed her reason, he paralyzed her will. While close to him she was conscious of being enveloped in an atmosphere pregnant with some compelling force her will could not resist—some subtle elixir which passed from his superabundant vigour over her, and pervaded her whole being with his power.

And this power of Ferrand's over her was, while it lasted, full of pleasure to her, not of fear, as one would have supposed. For his power was accompanied by love, and love casts out fear. But what did make Violet fear Julian was, that at each successive meeting with him alone, her own natural force of nerve and power of will sensibly diminished, and the strange, nameless fascination he exercised over her as sensibly increased.

Even as she sat now within the radius of his passionate gaze, she was conscious of a feeling of slight intoxication, of a sensuous delight in his presence such as flowers feel in noonday sunshine, or animals in the sun's bright rays. She could not draw herself away from him; yet she had no sense of fear, but rather of a protecting power, external to herself, yet shielding her, sun and shade combined in one, and that one loving her, devouring her with loving eyes.

Minutes went by. It seemed indeed a long time since Ferrand had spoken the

words which had recalled the memory of young Charles Brassingham so vividly to her mind's eye; but still she kept silence, drinking in, indeed, from his overcharged battery the magnetic fluid that was wrapping her in an invisible robe. Her tears ceased falling, but her head was heavy, and she scarce heeded the ripples as they gurgled monotonously over the smooth pebbles in the stream.

When next he spoke his words seemed hushed and low; yet she was conscious that his hand, warm and dry and strong, had taken hers into the hollow of its palm, and that she liked its being there. It felt so safe, nestling in the brawny strength of his.

"Darling," he said, "my heart's great love, will you not trust yourself with me? Will you not be my wife? My strength shall strengthen you; my love shall be your joy and your defence; my arm shall fight life's battles for you and shield you from every harm; my whole life shall devote itself to you, and guard my treasure from every

wind of ill. Darling—my darling—love me—be my wife!”

His arm had stolen round her slender waist; his handsome, swarthy face was bent down close to hers; his breath was hot upon her cheek. She struggled, and would have risen, but the spell of his magnetism, more than any exertion of muscular force, kept her riveted to the spot.

A little low cry escaped her, a cry that could not be mistaken for one of joy. Another moment, and his lips, unrepelled, might have drunk their fill from hers, so completely was she fascinated and spellbound by his magnetic force, when suddenly the boughs were thrust aside, and Julian's mother stood before the pair.

A horrible dread had come over Madame Julia lest this girl, whom her son so worshipped, should be one of Mr. Brassingham's daughters. Julian had uttered no name by which she might have obtained a clue to the girl's identity, neither had Violet let fall in her remarks anything which might preclude such a possibility.

Overwrought by her trying interview with Mr. Brassingham, Madame Julia's nerves were further shaken by so suddenly discovering her son—whom she had no reason to suppose was in her neighbourhood—actually among the very same party as his own father and half-sisters, and yet not knowing his relationship. Forced either to remain hidden behind the rowan trees or to risk an explanation of her presence she wished on all accounts at present to avoid, she had chosen the former alternative, until terror at her own surmise had broken down her determination to remain unseen, and she had abruptly made known her presence.

The suddenness of his mother's appearance, like a spirit straight from the clouds, was to Julian Ferrand like a thunderbolt. He did not even know she was in England; believed her, in fact, to be still in Vienna, where last he had heard of her. He was a man of iron nerve, yet in some ways not untouched by superstitious fancies, and the apparition of his mother, haggard, pale, and

dishevelled,—his mother, whom he had believed thousands of miles away, standing there wan and worn and grim, within ten yards of him, was to him as a disembodied spirit from the tomb.

He bounded to his feet. No sound escaped his lips.

His mother placed her finger on her lips, then pointed at Violet. The girl, struck with a nameless terror, already completely overdone, had fainted dead away.

“It is I, your mother, Julian,” said Madame Julia, “I, in flesh and blood. You need not look so scared; I had business near Ilkley, my dear son, of so pressing a nature that I stayed but one day in London on my way to Yorkshire, and my surprise at seeing you is almost as great as yours at meeting me. Julian, who is this girl?”

Madame Julia, as she spoke, bent down to loosen the handkerchief that was round Violet's throat, and chafed the small white hands.

“Her name is Champneys, mother,—

Violet Champneys," said her son. "She is the ward of a Mr. Brassingham, who is staying at the Ilkley Wells, and she—is the woman I would make my wife!"

A look of unutterable relief passed over Madame Julia's face as he uttered these words.

"I had feared she was some one else," she muttered; but Julian did not catch the words. "Get some water quickly, in your hat," she added aloud. "Poor child, her faint lasts long. My sudden appearance has well-nigh frightened her to death. I had best not be here, Julian, when she recovers consciousness. Come to me, my son, to-morrow morning at the Abbey Fields Farmhouse; you pass it on the road to Ilkley Wells. There I will explain. One word! As long as we are here in this neighbourhood together, treat me before others as a perfect stranger; show no sign of recognition whenever or wherever we may meet. I can trust you, Julian, to be discreet. You have ever been obedient." She drew his handsome head down and kissed him with

all a mother's rapturous love, then vanished as suddenly as she had come.

He stooped and bathed Violet's temples with the water from the brook. Soon, with a little fluttering sigh, consciousness came back, the blue eyes opened wide. She passed her hand over her brow and found it wet. "Where am I?" she exclaimed.

"In safe hands, be sure," he answered. "You are better now. It was but a sudden faintness. The sun is hot, and you have been overdone."

"I seem to have been in a trance," she said; "but it was all confused. Voices were calling me to come and live in some perpetual sunshine—in bliss and joy; a sort of heaven seemed opening to my spirit, but my body was not there. I was winging my flight through space, like some ethereal essence, visiting spiritland. Then other voices called—voices I heard long ago—calling me back to earth, calling me false and faithless, and fickle as the wind—and these reproachful voices pressed so close they passed between the sunshine and my form,

then died away. And then there came a shape—a form so weird and strange and sad—all draped in black, that seemed to wither me with its lurid gaze, and I shrank back from it as it advanced, and fell through the air to earth faster and faster, till strength and memory failed me. Ah! it was horrible!” And Violet covered her face with her hands and seemed as though the very memory would make her swoon again.

To Ferrand’s intense relief, a burst of merriment from well-known voices fell on his ear. It came from close by, a little higher up the stream, where some huge stones had been somewhat loosely piled to form a bridge across the brawling brook. The stones had formed a dam, so that the water on either side was deeper than elsewhere.

The sketching-party, homeward bound (for luncheon-time was drawing near), had stumbled on Vere Vereker and Anne Brassingham, ensconced in a leafy retreat, beneath a gnarled old oak. The lovers—for such they were undoubtedly considered—seemed

rather relieved than otherwise at this interruption to their *tête-à-tête*, and, in no way embarrassed at being discovered, had joined forces with the rest on the homeward route. To have gone round by the lower ford would have been circuitous and wearisome, so Theodora, ever foremost in advance, had persuaded her companions to cross the river by the stones. She, followed by Frank Freeman, Agatha, and Tempest, had already crossed, and stood waiting for the others on the further side.

Miss Higgins, with a sudden access of affectation, had advanced and retired, each time with a greater assumption of nervousness, until she had at last declared that it was quite impossible for her to cross, that the water on either side made her giddy, and that she would go round by the lower ford. Every one knew perfectly well that the excuse was solely to entrap Mr. Tresilian into the necessity of taking her back to the inn alone, so that all might see how she had been provided with a distinguished escort, but as they could not wait all day, there was nothing for

it but to abandon Mr. Tresilian to his fate.

Miss Anne Brassingham, however, had not the smallest intention of walking a long way home, nor were her nerves ever in such a condition as to prevent her crossing Niagara even, if that could have saved her bulky person trouble. Giving Vere Vereker her hand, rather than taking his, she essayed to transport her ponderous person across the slippery stones. Vere, who was but a whipper-snapper of a man at his best, and given to as much method in crossing a brook as though it involved mathematical calculations of the nicest preciseness, found himself considerably overweighted by the ballast he was attempting to convoy in safety to the opposite bank.

Anne, whose natural awkwardness never for a moment deserted her, caught her foot in the torn braid of her skirt, and after several plunges, much after the fashion of a fine young whale, succeeded in landing both herself and Vereker in about three feet of water in the middle of the stream.

Nothing amuses so finely as our friends' misfortunes. Those who had safely crossed and those who had stayed behind had lifted up their voices in much simultaneous mirth, which had attracted the attention of Julian Ferrand and the hysterical girl, who seemed as though she were just passing into another faint.

Theodora, being engaged in wringing out Anne's dripping garments, had not noticed Ferrand's signals of distress, but Agatha's quick ear had caught his shout, and, divining from his signals that there was something wrong, she ran swiftly down the bank to where Violet was lying. The girl was beating the air with her hands, as though trying to keep off some form invisible to any save herself. Her eyes were closed, and now and then a low moan of fear escaped her lips.

Agatha soothed her as only a woman born a nurse is able. The gentle touch of her caressing hands soon cleared away the symptoms of hysteria. Then she bethought herself of Tempest's flask. Pouring some brandy into the silver cup she persuaded Violet to drain it down, and in a minute

more Miss Champneys was herself again. Fortunately the remainder of the party were too occupied with the two half-drowned creatures whom they had just fished out of the pool to notice Violet's illness or to speculate upon its cause. By the time they came up Violet's recovery was complete, and, as Agatha affected to make light of her friend's faintness, no one guessed that it had been from other cause than overtiredness and heat.

CHAPTER XV.

ANNE BRASSINGHAM GETS INTO DIFFICULTIES.

THE relations which were supposed to exist between Mr. Vereker and the eldest Miss Brassingham gave all the more a comic colouring to their watery adventure. Mrs. Higgins and Lady Amory especially, who had been on the tip-toe of expectation all the morning for the announcement of the engagement during the day, were pleased to be extravagantly amused at the disconcerted air with which the pair had put in their first appearance in what was presumably an affianced state.

Dry clothing having been procured from the landlord and landlady of the inn, while their own was being dried, Mr. Vereker and

Miss Brassingham joined the luncheon party. Nor could any one guess from their manner to one another whether the engagement might be considered a settled thing or not.

Vereker, in the best go-to-meeting frock-coat of the worthy but burly Yorkshire inn-keeper, showed to less advantage even than usual, and was nearly lost in its capacious folds. The inn-keeper was a man of enormous girth, whose chest had long ago receded above his increasing obesity and portentous corpulence. The "extenuations," moreover, of stout fustian which he had placed at Vereker's disposal could have included a dozen Verekers within their yards of waist. A satin waistcoat of the brightest hue, which had to be tied round Vereker's middle with a towel, lest the absence of linen should be too discernible, completed Vere's motley costume. But "needs must when the devil drives." Other clothes to be borrowed there were none, so with finger-tips peeping from the coat's long arms, and fustians tucked up above a pair of hobnailed boots, Vere Vereker sat down beside his intended bride.

It had been found impossible to imprison Anne's ample form within the dimensions of the clothes the landlady's wardrobe could provide. The latter was a shrivelled little body, who was wont to hop about the premises much like a parched pea on a drum, and who enjoyed the advantages of a figure in which all curves were but conspicuous by their absence. To force Anne Brassingham's ponderous person into this little person's dress, was obviously out of the question, but a *robe de chambre* given to the little old woman by a former mistress some forty years previously, which from its gorgeousness had been preserved as an heirloom in the family, was made to form at least a decent covering. What matter that the gown was of yellow satin with an amber sacque and train? In combination with a scarlet petticoat reaching a little below Anne's knees, the costume was as gorgeous as it was incongruous. But Miss Brassingham was of a practical turn of mind. No sense of the ridiculous was likely to disturb her peace of mind or interfere with her very

healthy appetite. Still it did seem a little odd that this should be the dress in which she was to make or mar the future fortunes of her life. For Vereker had said too much before he was interrupted to draw back; yet not enough, perhaps, to warrant her giving him the answer he required. She felt there was more to come.

Clothes, however, to whomsoever they may belong, after having been submerged in a running stream, will take their own time to dry. When luncheon was over the landlady emphatically declared that it might be a couple of hours or more before it would be possible for the lady and gentleman to don their own attire. That the rest of the party should lose the enjoyment of a delicious autumn day in the woods and glades about Bolton Abbey because two of their party had taken an untimely bath was quite preposterous. Engaged or not engaged, both Vere Vereker and Miss Brasingham were quite capable of taking care of themselves; indeed they both protested with such vehemence against the necessity

for any others staying behind on their account that it would have been in bad taste for any one to remain.

Violet, instinctively shrinking from any chance of being again alone with Mr. Ferrand, all the more easily fell in with Mr. Brassingham's views that she should accompany him to the ruins of the Abbey.

"Cupid and Psyche," to judge by their mutual silence on their return from their woodland wanderings, had either fallen out, or were tired of each other's blandishments, for Eric Amory persistently attached himself to Theodora during the rest of the day, while May relieved Tresilian from the embarrassing burden of Miss Higgins's society.

Frank Freeman, at all times the most devoted of sons, steadily declined to listen to his mother's assertions that she wanted no one to look after her, and would prefer his going off with the young people; while Captain Selfe, true to his traditional loyalty, now as ever placed Mrs. Tempest's happiness and requirements before all other

considerations. These four set out together on their own little jaunt, for Mrs. Tempest's infirmities prevented her going far, and only that far with Selfe's strong arm for a support ; and Lady Catherine's powers were no longer of the most enduring.

The Reverend Silas Monckton, finding his attentions ignored by Lady Amory and Mrs. Higgins, had determined on laying siege to the remains of Miss Lavinia's heart. She was rather acid in temper, certainly, as she was angular in person, but in Mr. Monckton's eyes a snug fortune in the Three per Cents had great powers to gild the pill, which he at any rate was quite ready to swallow. To-day his attentions had been unmistakable, and to the infinite amusement of the wealthy widows, whom he had previously sought to charm, the "little pitcher with the long ears," as he was now most frequently designated by the last-named ladies, was seen ambling along by the side of the lanky Miss Lavinia, with difficulty adapting his short legs to her enormous strides.

Agatha, true to her mission, left no subject undiscussed that she thought would interest and amuse her *protégé*. She talked horses and dogs, turf and cards, music and novels, spiritualism and the origin of species; she found Tempest not only well informed and well read, but possessed of much originality of thought and power of expression, while his morbid impression that he had incurred the dislike and contempt of his fellows had gone far to warp and spoil the whole man. With graceful banter and apt repartee she kept the young man amused and interested throughout the livelong day; drawing him out on subjects in which he was at home, covering his retreat where ignorance or blunders endangered his relapse into self-depreciation and shamefacedness. Nor was Miss Higgins neglected by the poor companion. Throughout the afternoon Agatha contrived that Loftus should appear Miss Higgins's *preux chevalier*, while she and Matilda Tempest made believe to drop behind. Under the healthful stimulant of Agatha's invigorating talk, pleased, too, at

the open satisfaction the rich Miss Higgins showed in his society, the lad plucked up heart and spirit to grapple with his vice, and as he walked along over the purple heather and the yellow gorse, imbibing health and vigour at each step he took, he made a silent vow that, come what would, his life should be disburdened of this curse, which threatened both life and reason with an early end. The very vow made to himself alone, the consciousness of having started in the race, the earnest purpose that dwelt upon his heart, seemed to make life, even now, a joyous and a hopeful thing.

Thus Agatha sowed good seed ; not in this ground alone : wherever this girl found herself placed in life good angels seemed to gather round, and dispel all evil from about her presence. For her soul was single in its aim ; on every brow to seal the impress of her God.

CHAPTER XVI.

ANNE BRASSINGHAM SEALS HER FATE.

MEANWHILE in the old-fashioned settle by the fire of the best parlour in the inn sat Vere Vereker and Anne Brassingham; not hand-in-hand, nor engaged in any of the weak blandishments usually indulged in by pairs of youthful lovers left alone together for the first time since they had come to a mutual understanding.

No! Both Vere and Anne prided themselves on being practical people—people who understood the value of money, the advantages of social position, and the real worth of each and all the qualifications which are necessary to success in life: but the value of

love, in all or any of its bearings, they had by mutual consent decided to leave out of the question.

People too often imagine themselves suited to the objects of their choice in marriage because their opinions coincide in art or literature, philosophy or religion; whereas it is the harmonious blending of diverse natures, the dovetailing of opposite proclivities, which fashion and perfect the man and woman made one.

So Vere and Anne, being both very practical, very truth-loving, and very discontented, had found material on which to build an offensive and defensive alliance, which might have flourished as a Platonic affection without doing much good or harm to either had not the petty miseries of an ill-conducted home on the one side, and the rigorous privations of a grinding poverty on the other, proved at length insupportable, and suggested to the minds of both the idea of a convenient marriage as a probable alleviation to their many woes.

Although there was nothing heroic about

Vere Vereker; though his face bore a strong resemblance to that of a weasel, and his figure was lean and unimportant; though his shoulders sloped, and he was knock-kneed, and his biceps and calves were purely muscles of the imagination, yet, leaving his physical appearance out of the question, Vere Vereker by no means deserved the unqualified contempt expressed for him by Theodora to Frank Freeman. If he was a bit of a prig, somewhat over-methodical and old-maidish in his ways, still he possessed many sterling good qualities, which a woman of Anne Bravingham's practical nature was able to value at their true worth.

Theodora, following in the footsteps of her father's family, ever demanded bodily strength and beauty as a passport to her notice, after which she might or might not find other qualifications which recommended a man to her favour; but Anne, who from her earliest years had educated herself in direct opposition to these inherent Bravingham characteristics, and had, moreover, no

eye for the beautiful in either art or nature, always went direct to a man's deeper nature, and left his external appearance, and even his more superficial manner and eccentricities, entirely out of the question.

Now Vereker was strictly a moral man—his mere acquaintances would have called him strait-laced—his more lax companions dubbed him a prig and a bore—but Anne, in her hatred of that specious immorality which allows to gallantries a fame which in all other forms of falsehood is considered infamous, had set this one virtue on the loftiest pedestal, and, finding it in Vereker, let it do duty in her mind for many more.

Then Anne loved truth—plain, unvarnished, uncompromising truth. This, too, she found in Vereker. If a thing had to be said which could carry no gloss upon its words, both Vere and Anne could be trusted to say it with an unhesitating disregard of people's feelings, and a clear, outspoken roughness which admitted of no compromise. How far this characteristic might prove an

element in domestic bliss neither Vere nor Anne had much considered, but in a mere system of Platonics, to be enjoyed at will for an idle hour, unbridled condemnation of one's neighbour doubtless has a charm; the more so to some natures, when blurted in that neighbour's face.

Neither were Anne and Vere amiable people, but they, in their single blessedness, took keen enjoyment in their unamiability, and even delighted to remind each other of such and such a smart remark which had brought the blush of shame or the flush of wrath to an adversary's brow. Vere Vereker was smart, and Anne appreciated his smartness. He was a man of high birth, well connected, respectable, and respected. He belonged to a family who were prolific in the production of antiquaries, misers, and old maids. No branch of the Verekers had been known to fail in developing all that was sparing, humdrum, and barren in their natures. Anne, who viewed her own family as something external to herself, in which she had no part, and who heartily despised

the extravagance and sensuality which formed so large a part of the Brassingham character, fancied she had found safe anchorage for herself and fortune in so thrifty and well-regulated an admirer as Vere.

On the other hand, Vereker, though untouched by the shafts of love, was not only inclined to marry, but had cast about among his various acquaintances for some time past for a partner who, besides being congenial to his mind, should compensate by her vigour of body and length of purse for the singularly scanty and meagre proportions of his own. Mr. Vereker was much given to ventilating philosophical opinions on the advantages that would accrue to the human race generally if the State would condescend to regulate the Court of Hymen; but, as he failed to see any indications that such a course would be pursued by Her Majesty's Government during his own generation, he was fain to content himself by becoming a self-constituted minister of marriage in his own case, and he believed that he had found in Miss Brassingham the

requirements and compensations that his own deficiencies demanded. Without being in any way beautiful, she possessed, in common with all the Brassinghams, a matchless vigour of physique and constitution, such as delighted the possible father of future generations of Verekers, and her ample fortune would not only relieve him from the grinding poverty which at present hindered and well-nigh defeated all his efforts towards success, but would ensure their children every advantage in the race of life that money and what money buys could give.

“Then I may hope, Miss Brassingham, that you consider my proposal favourably?” piped the high voice of Vere Vereker from his corner of the settle, as he drummed the borrowed hobnailed boots on the stone floor of the best parlour.

“I was not aware that you had made any proposal, Mr. Vereker,” she answered, not from any coquettishness, but because she had been rather uncertain whether his remarks in the morning, which had been

so unfortunately interrupted, amounted to a proposal of marriage or not.

Vereker prided himself on always going direct to the point without any nonsense or "palaver"; so he stopped playing the devil's tattoo with his boots on the stone floor, and looked Anne straight in the face:—

"Will you marry me, Miss Brasingham?"

"I will marry you, Mr. Vereker."

Then there was a pause, undisturbed by any pressure of hands, or meeting of lips, or incoherent ravings of life-long constancy and devotion.

Uncertainty as to their mutual intentions having been thus summarily disposed of, Vere Vereker proceeded to make himself more clearly understood in detail.

"I believe you are aware, Miss Brasingham, that I have no means of my own to fall back upon, that is, neither private property nor allowance from my family, nor, in short, anything except what I can make by my brains at the bar, or by literary pursuits?"

“I am quite aware of that, Mr. Vereker.”

“And you are content to marry me under these circumstances, Miss Brassingham?”

“I am content, Mr. Vereker.”

“Because, if at any future time in our career,” continued Vere, rising, and holding his capacious fustians in a bunch, to prevent being left standing in his borrowed frock-coat alone, “we should happen to have any little difficulties—matrimonial difficulties, you know—I should wish it remembered that I had been explicit as to my poverty at the time I solicited your hand.”

“You are quite explicit, Mr. Vereker. I will also tell you plainly the position of my affairs. From my mother I inherit 50,000*l.*, my mother’s whole fortune; she thought fit to leave me all she had; perhaps because I was her companion and her favourite child, perhaps because I did not possess my sisters’ advantages of person. She also left me her diamonds, valued at 10,000*l.* more. Now to those diamonds, Mr. Vereker, my father disputes my claim; he has them at present in his possession,

that is, at his banker's ; and those diamonds I mean to have."

"You do not mean to say that you contemplate a law-suit with your father, Miss Brassingham?"

"I mean to have the diamonds," said Anne, doggedly. "The jewels are mine by inheritance, and I do not see that my father, because he is my father, has any more right to rob me of them than any housebreaker or professional thief."

"Well, well, let us hope there will be no difficulty in the matter," said Vere. "But, leaving the subject of the diamonds for the present, do you suppose your father is likely to oppose our marriage?"

"I think not. He will be quite as glad to be quit of me, as I of him."

"Then I may presume you will have no objection to our being united in the bonds of matrimony without greater delay than will be necessary for the arrangement of settlements?"

"Long engagements are a mistake," said Anne, decisively. "As we seem to have

definitely made up our minds, I have no objection to an early date."

"The sooner the better, then," said Vere. "What say you to the end of September? We shall then get settled in some home of our own before the winter sets in."

"I have no wish to postpone the date," answered Anne. "Perhaps, as you say, the sooner all the fuss is over the better. I will be prepared within a month of our return to Brassingham."

"Your hand upon it, *Anne*," said Vere, as he extended a damp bundle of digits, "I suppose we may as well practise the use of our Christian names under the circumstances?"

"Certainly, *Vere*," she returned, as she rose to plight her troth. She gave him her hand; he raised it ceremoniously to his lips.

Thus this strange pair of loveless lovers each to other plighted their troth; Anne in an amber *peignoir* and a red flannel petticoat, Vere in fustian "extenuations" and a blue, brass-buttoned frock-coat. But the

ludicrous in life had neither charm nor the reverse for them, and a promise to marry was part of life's business with these two, and was unrelieved by the slightest tinge of poetic fancy or love-inspired romance.

CHAPTER XVII.

VIOLET'S LOVERS—THE MILLIONNAIRE.

UNDER other circumstances than the present Violet Champneys would have been vexed rather than pleased at her enforced *tête-à-tête* with her guardian; but the girl was so terrified at the power which Julian Ferrand was gradually acquiring over her that she was glad of any society in which she could believe herself safe.

The enormous power wielded by animal electricity in our mutual relations one with another has never yet been sufficiently made the theme of any popular philosophy. Perhaps because so little comparatively is known absolutely to science as to its nature and results; perhaps because we are still

living on that borderland between a superstitious demonology and the free realms of natural religion. We are therefore apt to confuse the effects of animal magnetism with all sorts of so-called mental and spiritual phenomena, simply because the compelling force of animal magnetism is still held by the ignorant, the uneducated, and even by many whose imaginations are crowded with the supernatural and the diabolic, to be, in some weird and wicked way, the result of the machinations of an evil spirit.

So long as moral cowardice, or a shrinking from combating imbecilities which shelter themselves under the sacred name of religion, obtain, so long will impostors crowd the platforms of truth, who are content, so long as they themselves live on the fat of the land, to prostitute their lives to a lying but remunerative human witchcraft. That this power of animal magnetism is true, is enormous, and is only as yet partially known to science, will not be denied by any thinking people, and yet the results of this magnetism in the incidents of every-day life

seem to form no part of the calculations of rational beings. Of course there are thousands of people as absolutely deficient in this sense as are people in other senses, who are blind or deaf or paralyzed, and to such it is certainly not worth while to appeal; but those to whom a bountiful nature has imparted this—shall we call it *extra*?—sense are perfectly and often painfully aware of the sharp shock of attraction or repulsion, and sometimes both combined, experienced merely by contact with another's hand. Nor, with many whose organizations are hypersensitive to electric currents, is it even necessary that there should be so much as the contact of finger-tips. It would seem that some bodies are so heavily charged with electricity as to throw off unseen rays, to be taken up and absorbed by other bodies whose conditions are in sympathy with their own.

Such was the case with Violet Champneys and Julian Ferrand. The man was a very electric battery to those whose nervous conditions admitted his influence; and whereas

in the case of Freeman that influence produced a sense of attraction only, and in the case of many others a sense of aversion only, so in Violet Champneys the attraction and aversion were combined. Hence the girl's mingled emotions of rapture and terror when subjected to his influence; hence the feeling of intoxication that was wont to overpower her senses in his close proximity, and her shrinking repugnance to him as soon as the spell was broken.

Few men were by nature so dangerous to a woman's peace as Julian Ferrand. His fierce, corsair-like air, the deep mellow tones of his voice, the subtle, indefinable charm of a manner which could at once imply protection, devotion, and an unrealized caress; all these qualifications made deep impression on most women whom it was his fortune to meet, and not a few had suffered, even where he had had no intent to wound. But to a girl of Violet's tender years and susceptible temperament Ferrand was doubly dangerous. It was not his towering stature, nor his fierce beauty, nor his gigantic strength,

that had cast a web of fascination over the young girl's mind. These doubtless played their part; but it was his subtle power, the nameless magnetic fascination that was poured out upon her, that stole about Violet's senses and embalmed her in its intoxicating breath.

Had not her heart's fortress been so strongly garrisoned, doubtless it would have before now been stormed. But love, first love, in all the pride and glory of a first love's strength, had occupied that fortress months ago; and so despotic was that first love's rule that even in his bodily absence from his post his memory still held sway.

Violet, when relieved by nightfall from the determined siege, would gather courage from this memory, the courage, maybe, of a passionate despair, yet courage still; and would hug to her poor sad heart such shreds of hope as still were left her from the happier past. Then the next day she would hoist her little fluttering flag again, in weary hope for succour in the siege;

believing, against eyes and ears and brain, that love would prove himself at last her own true knight.

By Ferrand she felt, as it were, enthralled; life in his presence seemed a delirious dream. And often as she sat and thought on it she prayed for love to come and break the spell.

It was therefore with a feeling of absolute relief that Violet Champneys found herself strolling among the ruins of Bolton Abbey with Mr. Brassingham.

Though she was unable to view Mr. Brassingham with the eyes of a passionate love, yet, on the other hand, his devotion to her did not inspire her with any disgust or even aversion. On the contrary she loved him, as her guardian, right well, and as Charlie's father could have loved him even more. She felt for him gratitude, respect, admiration. He had given her food, shelter, and a home. He had shown her consideration first, and then an ardent love. She knew nothing of his past life, except that he had been most unhappy with his wife, and,

as she had been told that Anne Brassingham was her mother's counterpart, she was quite ready to believe that the fault had been on the wife's side. Up to the present time, moreover, until Ferrand's fierce love-making had forced Violet to probe her own heart to its inmost core, the constancy of the father had been daily placed in direct contrast with the faithlessness of the son, and Violet, in her pique at believing herself set aside and slighted for "that other woman," whom she saw in her mind's eye, had thought, with mischievous amusement even, of the day when Charlie might be her step-son; but Ferrand's rough and persistent wooing had torn away this flimsy veil of self-deception, and, by forcing her to question her own heart, had discovered to her the latent depths of love for Charlie in that heart which, till now, she had believed shallow enough to be bridged over by a grateful admiration for his father.

Violet, when roused, was capable of determined action. The influence of Ferrand's presence once removed, she had

regained her accustomed mental balance, and in the short time that had elapsed since luncheon she had formed very definite conclusions as to her future course of action. To tell Mr. Brassingham that she stood in daily terror of Julian Ferrand's influence would, she felt, only occasion unpleasantness of so decided a nature that the result would be the immediate breaking-up of the party assembled at the Wells; and, at the same time, the disclosure would in no way assist the accomplishment of her scheme of delay, which was so necessary to her plans; quite the reverse, for Mr. Brassingham would doubtless, in his efforts to guard her from the pernicious fascinations of Ferrand's society, inflict his own upon her at all times and seasons.

But she felt that the time was come when she must make a clean breast of her love for Charlie to Charlie's father, whatever the consequences of such confession might be. Above all other resolves in her mind was the one that she would marry nobody until—well, until all hope of

Charlie was more utterly extinguished in her breast than it had been up to now.

Mr. Brassingham was not long in coming straight to his point.

"Violet," he said, as they wandered through the ruined arches of the venerable abbey, "I have as purposely sought this interview to-day as hitherto I have held aloof. It is not fair to myself that I should let all my hopes of happiness slip out of my reach simply because I thought it due to you not to press my suit too instantly upon all that has just gone by."

Violet kept her eyes on the ground and waited for Mr. Brassingham to proceed.

"I believe that I could make you happy," continued Mr. Brassingham, "in spite of the difference in our years; besides wealth and position, you would have the boundless devotion of a life that would live for you alone. Still, Violet, I would have you marry me *because* you love me, and for that only; if there is any other with whom you believe your life would be made more perfect than with me, speak now and speak

boldly, and by doing so save both yourself and me a future lifetime of misunderstanding and self-reproach."

She glanced up at him, nerving herself to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Oh, how tenderly the bold brown eyes were gazing into her very soul! how manly and resolute and strong he looked in his towering stature and massive build, like some giant forest tree among the saplings of its species that were sheltered by its might!

"Mr. Brassingham," she said, striving hard to be firm in her resolve not to fear giving present pain, lest a life-long pain should be the penalty,—“Mr. Brassingham, I have promised to marry you, and if, in a month's time from now, there be no sufficient cause for my refusing to fulfil my promise, I will be your wife. But,” she added, as she moved aside to avoid his eager embrace, for he would have gathered her to his breast, “but it is fair and just to you to say now, at this very moment, that if, in any way, however strange, I should find I have been

deceived, and that the change in my resolve not to be your wife was in any way the result of treachery, then, Mr. Brassingham, I will never be your wife."

"The result of treachery, Violet!" said Mr. Brassingham, in amazement. "Explain yourself. What can you mean?"

"I will explain myself, Mr. Brassingham," she answered; "I ought to have done so long ago. Forgive me if I pain you. It is best for us both to suffer once than for always."

"From the first time Charlie and I met at Brassingham Park, I was drawn towards him, as he has over and over again assured me he was to me; that he loved me was so evident, that I took little heed of the precise manner of his words; to love him was so easy, so natural, so unavoidable; there seemed no reason in earth or heaven why we should not love on for ever. Then at length a letter reached me, an anonymous letter, saying that I had been deceived, that Charlie was in love with some woman in one of the suburbs of London, but whether

he was married to her or not the writer did not profess to know. The letter went on to say that if I had the courage to walk alone to a certain spot on the road between Brentford and Isleworth, ocular proof should be given me of what the writer asserted. Mr. Brasingham, I loved Charlie with all my heart and mind and strength, and my love gave me the courage to accept this mysterious proposal. At the place named a woman, closely veiled, drove up in a close carriage. She alighted, and we had some conversation in which she insisted, as one of her conditions, that I should accompany her blindfold, if I accompanied her at all. I hesitated. I was frightened; but my nerves were so strung up, and my life seemed worth so little if my love were mine no longer, that I yielded to the woman's persuasion."

"What sort of person was she?" interrupted Mr. Brasingham, as a glimmer of a possible solution to the mystery dawned on his mind.

"She was short and stout, with fair hair tinged with grey. I did not see her face.

Her voice was harsh and her pronunciation not that of a lady; on her left hand was a wedding-ring; in age she could not have been under fifty. I submitted to be blindfolded. We drove for about half an hour, the last part of the journey being made over grass. Then we alighted. She led me, still blindfolded, into a house. The handkerchief was then removed, and I found myself in a small snug parlour, much as one might expect to find in a country farm-house, or a suburban inn. There was nothing offensive about the woman's manner—indeed, she was very kind; she tried to remove all causes for fear, offered me tea, or milk, or wine, spoke of children of her own who had died many years before, and at last said, somewhat abruptly, still keeping her veil closely over her face,—

“ ‘ Now, Miss Champneys, you will hardly suspect *me* of being your rival in the affections of Mr. Charles Brassingham? You do not know who I am, and probably you never will know; but I do not choose you, for reasons of my own, to be made a fool of by

the young gentleman in question. He is at this moment in this house with the woman whom he loves. Seeing is believing. Follow me and judge for yourself; but whatever you see, keep silence.'

"So saying, she led the way down a dimly-lighted passage, and motioning me to tread on tip-toe, entered a sort of gallery, like a tiny organ-loft, across one end of which a curtain of green baize was stretched on thin brass rods. The curtain was old and worn, and there were holes in it large enough for me to see what was going on in the hall below.

"This hall had all the appearance of having been the entrance-hall of some baronial residence. Doors led from it in all directions. It was lighted from above. The walls were panelled with oak, darkened by time, and smoked to a funereal blackness. Its length was immense, and only at the further end, away from where we stood concealed, had there been any attempt made to furnish it as a habitable apartment. Immediately below me the floor was uncarpeted ;

the walls were hung with prints of prize-fighters, sporting scenes, horses, and a few coarse coloured pictures of dancing-women. I noticed also foils and boxing-gloves lying about, clubs and single-sticks such as one might see in a gymnasium. But I hardly thought of all this then, though the details have become impressed upon me since by constantly dwelling on the scene in my mind's eye, for at the further end of the vast hall I saw in the dim shadows of a deep recess the figures of a man and a young girl. The girl was very fair, cast in a large mould, a strong, fine woman, very simply dressed. Her face was towards me, but the room was so large, and the light so dim, that I conceived no exact impression of her features. Standing before her, leaning against the side of the recess, I saw—your son! His head was thrown back against the dark oak panels, while he watched the woman in silence from beneath his brows. The light was dim, I know, and his full face was not turned my way, but I could not be mistaken, Mr. Brasingham. There were

the clustering brown curls, and the heavy brown moustache, and the same impatient way of tossing back his head. It was his figure, too, and even the tricks of movement were those of the man I had known and loved so well ! ”

And here the memory of that scene, intensified in little Violet's mind by incessant repetition in her dreams, bore, in its crushing misery, upon her with so fierce a wave that she leaned against a ruined pillar at her side and wept as though her heart would break.

“ My child, be comforted,” said Mr. Brassingham. “ You should have told me all this before, but what you saw explains but little of importance even now. A man may gaze at a pretty woman with any amount of rapture in his glance, and yet be as far from marrying her as the poles are far apart. If this was all you saw, be comforted.”

“ It was not all,” gasped Violet, through her sobs. “ It was not nearly all. He stood there silent for some moments watching her, waiting for some answer, evidently, to what he had said before. Her hands were inter-

laced upon her lap, as she moved them nervously up and down, and I could see her bosom rise and fall with some extreme of joy or pain, I knew not which.

“ ‘Well!’ he said presently, in that low, deep voice that Charlie always has when he is much moved—‘well, have I given you my heart in vain? Come, Alice! the time is past for jest. I must have my answer,—Yes or No?’ ”

“ ‘And I heard her answer ‘Yes’; and I saw two great blue eyes look up to his, and down again upon her trembling hands, and I saw those hands unlaced and twined about his neck, as he knelt close beside her and pillowed his curly head upon her lap. Then the woman who was with me took my hand and led me back along the narrow passages into the room in which we had first sat.

“ ‘Are you satisfied?’ she said.

“ ‘Yes, I am satisfied,’ was my reply.

“ ‘And now that you have seen with your own eyes how greatly he loves another, you will hardly let yourself be blinded by any protestations he may make to you.’ ”

“I said nothing ; but I suppose the look on my face was a sufficient answer. I rose to go ; I allowed myself to be again blindfolded, and my guide, who had never for a moment removed the thick veil she wore, escorted me back to the spot where she had met me. The handkerchief was taken from my eyes ; I walked home as one in a dream, but through it all I held to one fixed resolve—never to see Charlie more, or, at any rate, never to listen to his vows of love. Then you met me as I entered the Park gates. My heart and my strength were alike spent and dying. Life was over, for love was dead ; but I wanted shelter and rest, and such peace as the broken in heart may find. You know the rest. It remains now for you to say if you would wish to wed a woman who has thus loved your son.”

The great brown eyes looked tenderly down into hers. His strong arms took her to his close embrace.

“My poor unhappy little love, how can I comfort you ?” was all he found to say in words. But in his heart, the strong pro-

tective love of middle age, that at once tempers and intensifies the fiercer flame of more intemperate youth, burnt all the steadier now that he knew the truth. The luxury of combat was great to all the Brassinghams, and to John Brassingham, perhaps, even more than to his children. There are some natures so leonine in their characteristics and proclivities, that contest, especially in the fields of love, is an absolute necessity of their being. On such natures the charm of reciprocity is thrown away. A languid aversion only fires them the more, indifference stimulates the flame, while at a rival's interference every passion of their temperament leaps into vitality and rages to its quenching, either in lust or blood.

So was it with John Brassingham. The man came of a lion-like stock, of a race that a couple of generations further back had wielded the hammer in the blacksmith's forge, and whose brawny might had been a byword among their fellow-workers, who were no feeble folk themselves; a race fierce, brave, and combative, in whom the

animal instincts had so preponderated as to leave but little room for the growth of those tender blossoms of sentiment and romance which form so fragrant a chaplet for the brows of the artist and the poet. The fruits of imagination found no storage in the Brassingham brain; the results of cultured leisure had no charms for it. The very morality of the Brassinghams was but a covenant between man and man—not between man and God. Their code of law was interhuman. So far as duty was a reciprocal question between one nation and another or one person and another, so far they understood it, and so far, to the best of their ability, they strove to act up to it. To them the second of the two great commandments was all the law and the prophets, while they left the first as a battle-ground no one would care to occupy, and which was to be taken too much as a matter of course to require even the compliment of reflection upon its meaning.

When to an inherited character of such a type we add a physical vigour undermined

by no intemperance, we can begin to understand the temper in which John Brassingham received the assurance that he was *not* beloved by the woman on whom he doted, and that the man who stood between him and the gratification of the strongest passion it had ever been his fate to suffer was his own hitherto well-loved son.

As long as the combative qualities of his nature had not been called into play, Mr. Brassingham had really and honestly believed that he sought Violet's happiness even more than his own in the marriage he contemplated between them. During the time they had spent at the Yorkshire Wells, a growing jealousy of Julian Ferrand had certainly been springing up in his mind, but this was now too utterly allayed by Violet's explicit avowal of her love for Charlie for him to feel any uneasiness upon that score. Jealous of his son, most jealous, Mr. Brassingham undoubtedly was—for it is in the nature of every leonine human being to be jealous wherever the passions are concerned—but what chafed Mr. Brassingham most was

that his own son should possibly prove his successful rival; for Charlie was by many degrees nearer the *beau idéal* of an English gentleman than his father, as that father was many degrees in advance of the ironmaster who had "married the business" and laid the foundations of the family fortunes with his employer's money and his own vigour and brains.

Few things are harder to bear among self-made men than the growing superiority of their children to themselves; especially in those cases where the want of birth and breeding has been an acknowledged deficiency in the family annals. John Brasingham's wife had contributed nothing to the Brasingham escutcheon. The Flints had been moneyed people, Anne Flint had been the heiress of their wealth, but they were neither more nor less than wholesale tradespeople, and the generation before them had been too obscure even for tradition to have passed down their occupation. But in proportion as Mr. Brasingham was less cultivated than his children, so he was more

combative—in short he possessed more of the savage than his son; and now that he found that son directly opposed to him in the affections of Violet Champneys, the whole animal obstinacy and contentiousness of the man came out into full prominence, and he swore to himself, between his clenched teeth, that, come what might, this girl should be his wife.

If Charlie proved contumacious, why, Charlie must be starved into compliance! made to go about his business! cut off with the traditional shilling! disinherited! Thank the stars! the Brassinghams had all been too radical in their opinions to fetter themselves with any laws of entail.

Thus Mr. Brassingham meditated fiercely to himself, but of his wrath he showed no outward sign. Even though he was no longer in his first youth, the prize was worth the waiting for, and he would win it yet.

“You cannot lead a maiden life, my child, because love’s vows have once proved false,” he said, as he held her slender figure close to his colossal frame. “Your fresh

young life must not be allowed to wither before its summer because the winds of early spring have proved so keen ! Cheer up, my Violet ! For your confidence I love you all the more. Let the father make up to you all he can what you have suffered at the hands of the son. I accept your proposal. If in a month's time nothing fresh should have occurred to restore your confidence in your youthful lover, you shall crown my life by giving me yourself."

Then he led her back through the ruined arches and the shattered shrines, by the rugged masonry where peep out from every chink the wall-fern and the black maiden-hair, through glades of bracken and fox-glove bells, through copse of larch and pine; but all the glory of the autumn woods was nought to her in her present frame of mind. The sunshine had faded from her life, what was it to her that it flooded nature around her ? She loved her idol Charlie, and yet she had promised to be his father's wife.

Mr. Brassingham was determined, however, that the chain should not snap for lack

of riveting. He had avowed his intention of making their engagement immediately public, and it was with almost a sense of shame and guilt that Violet presented herself at the inn-door on the arm of her affianced lord.

The sun was already setting behind the pine woods when Mr. Brassingham and Violet arrived at the inn. Every one had got home before them. Tea was nearly over, and their non-appearance had occasioned not a little comment, so that when at last they came all eyes were turned towards them, as it seemed to poor Violet, with inquisitorial meaning.

She was glad when the break was ready and it was time to start. Nor was she alone in her desire to reach the Wells, and seek some peace away from prying eyes and laughing lips whose joyousness was mockery to others' woes.

Theodora was silent and gloomy, bursting out now and then into fitful merriment in which the ring of a false mirth was discoverable in a discordant undertone.

May, too, was silent, though from a different cause. She was busy sipping the nectar of love's young dream, a nectar whose sweetness never cloy, whose elixir glides through blood and brain with soft, delirious delight and ever-rising hope.

The toil of the day had told on Loftus, as Agatha knew it must. He drooped in sickly languor like some thirsty plant. His weary eyes looked dark and sunken under their cavernous brows; the lines had deepened on his youthful face, and the mouth looked drawn and hard. But now and then, when his glance met Agatha's, her happy look of encouragement and sympathy was feebly answered by a dreary smile. Nor had she hoped for more. She had seen too much of the struggles against drink to underrate the young fellow's valiant efforts for even this single day. She knew his yearning thirst, his aching mental void; she could almost feel the dry, parched throat, and the agonizing unstringing of the nerves, that she knew full well must be his portion for the first few days; for had she not that

highest of all high gifts—an illimitable sympathy! How could she help him bear his trial? How could she aid him to his self-restraint. How feeble and weak she felt to save one erring soul. But Agatha took her hopes and fears to the Throne where she always laid her burdens, thinking, knowing, believing that from that Throne there is no dismissal, and leaving them in the hands of God.

END OF VOL. I.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY E. J. FRANCIS AND CO.
TOOK'S COURT AND WINE OFFICE COURT, E.C.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



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